Shark Tank

Posted originally on the Archive of Our Own at http://archiveofourown.org/works/1510121.

Rating:	Explicit
Archive Warning:	Creator Chose Not To Use Archive Warnings
Category:	M/M
Fandom:	Hannibal (TV)
Relationship:	Will Graham/Hannibal Lecter
Characters:	Hannibal Lecter, Will Graham, Beverly Katz, Brian Zeller, Jimmy Price, Jack Crawford, Alana Bloom
Additional Tags:	Alternate Universe - Prison, Cannibalism, Violence, Attempted Sexual Assault, Sexual Coercion, Dubious Consent, Prison Sex, Sadism, Hannibal is Hannibal, Homophobic Language, past Alana/Hannibal relationship, Past Child Abuse, Murder Husbands
Language:	English
Series:	Part 1 of Shark Tank
Collections:	Masterpieces, International Fanworks Day 2022 - Classic Fic Recs
Stats:	Published: 2014-04-23 Completed: 2014-08-22 Words: 71,358 Chapters: 29/29

Shark Tank

by xzombiexkittenx

Summary

Will and Hannibal meet in prison. Hannibal is still the Ripper, Will is still a profiler who had encephalitis. Only now they're cell mates

Notes

Translation into Русский язык by Hanigray here at Ficbook
color-division made this fantastic gif set that mentions Shark Tank after Mads made a comment about reading fanfic

- Translation into 中文-普通话 國語 available: 鲨鱼池（Shark Tank） by ElisaDay
- Translation into Русский available: [Restricted Work] by Anonymous
- Translation into Русский available: Shark Tank / Резервуар с акулами by sverhanutaya
- Translation into беларуская available: Shark Tank // Рэзервуар з акуламі by KasziMa

Chapter 1

Chapter Notes

Created in response to a prompt from Trr-rr on tumblr.

The bit Zee says about sharks ‘all got teeth’ is from one of the 8 thousand documentaries on prison I watched. Katz’s speech upon entry is partially taken from HBO’s OZ. Everything I know about prison I learned from TV and Wikipedia, so basically I know nothing. Any and all French is my own bad translation. I don't speak French so I apologize for any mistakes.

photobucket
more of your memories for less!

Artwork by HUAHUA363

The transport bus takes Will from jail to prison. He's been given twenty-five years, parole in twenty, if he's good. Will knows he won't be good. It won't be possible, not with so many murderers in his head, and violence all around him. He's going to drown in it. Will is too exhausted to care about that one way or the other. He hasn't slept properly in weeks and everything has started to blur at the edges again.

There are a handful of other guys on the bus. Will is one of two white men, and he can't help but think about the racism inherent in the system. God knows he spent most of his professional career putting away middle-aged white men who did unspeakable things. It's strange to consider that these criminals might have got three strikes on a drug count, or got into the wrong bar fight. Although, just as easily, they might have murdered someone. It's impossible to know.

It's not particularly nice out, but it's not raining either. Scattered clouds, he thinks they call it. Will presses his cheek and fingers to the grill over the windows and watches the power lines go by, and watches the feathered stag racing alongside the bus. His brain might not be boiling in his skull any more, but the stag still follows him. He can't sleep with his head rattling against the grate with every bump in the road jolting up through shocks badly in need of repair, but it lulls him into a sort of stupor until the bus is shuddering to a stop and they're there.

Will is shuffled off the bus with the rest of his compatriots, leg irons hobbling him. He can't understand how the others can walk. He feels like he's in a perpetual fall. Will spent most of his trial in and out of the hospital, or in and out of solitary. He hasn't acclimatized to movement, or chains, or being penned up with a hundred other men, most of them frustrated, angry, and bored. Will already knows this is going to get ugly.

He keeps his head down as they pass through the gates and into the first part of processing. All the rules and regulations float over his head. Will feels like he's walking three feet behind his own body, watching himself stumble through a strip-search. He's pale and the only one without tattoos. Except for the scars from his stabbing, Will is a blank canvas. The others are looking. Even the guards, with their blue gloves and rough hands, have pity in their eyes.

He climbs into new prison clothes – white underwear, white socks, white t-shirt, blue jumpsuit – and he's handed the essentials: bedclothes, underwear, toilet paper. They're moved through door after door, around corners, through corridors. He's lost already.

They're waiting in yet another holding area, uncuffed finally, when a scruffy guy with a perpetual look of 'are you fucking serious,' sits down next to him with a sigh. "Hey man," he says. "Zee. You look kind of messed up, are you okay?"

Will stares at his own ugly flat shoes. They don't have laces. He's not sure if he's special, on suicide watch, or if no one gets laces. He can't muster up the energy to check. His voice is

trapped in his throat and he works his mouth several times before he manages to say, “Not really.” It’s barely breath, the illusion of sound, but Zee seems to hear him anyway.

“First time, huh? Yeah, it can be a bit overkill. You gotta keep your head up though, these guys, you gotta be tough.” Zee chatters away and Will lets it wash over him, soaks up the noise and the easiness that Zee has. He’s been in and out of the system most of his life, minor infractions adding up to longer and longer sentences. Will knows it’s because Zee doesn’t know how to live outside of a prison. He basically grew up in juvie.

Will doesn’t know how much time has passed when a woman with a clipboard strides into the room. “Alright gentlemen,” she says. Her voice is strong, friendly enough, but still solid. She seems nice. “Some of you know this already, but I’m your in-flight safety announcement so you have to listen anyway. Your cell is your home, keep it clean, spotless. You are to exercise regularly, attend classes, go to drug and alcohol counseling. You are to work in one of the prison factories. You are to follow the routine. We tell you when to sleep, when to eat, when to piss. There is no yelling, no fighting, no fucking. Follow the rules, learn self-discipline, because if you had any self-discipline, any control over yourselves at all, you wouldn't be sitting here now.” She speaks like she’s reciting something she was taught. “Right Zee?”

“Right,” Zee says brightly, unoffended.

“I’m CO Katz, you can call me ma’am or boss. Either is fine. Anything else will get you put in lockdown, or the SHU so don’t try it.” She opens another locked door and holds it for them. “Welcome to BSP gentlemen, let me show you to your rooms.”

Zee nudges Will when Katz isn’t looking. “She’s nice, no bullshit, but not cruel. Some of the other screws, not so much. It’s hard being new in the aquarium, man,” he says. “But I’ll try and help you out.”

“Aquarium?” Will mutters as they form a line and ready to move out.

“In the tank,” Zee explains. He tips his head at the door they’re about to walk through. “Welcome to the shark tank, brother. There’s no fish out there. Fish don’t matter. It’s all sharks. All got teeth.”

They’re herded into the rec area of Unit 3, A-block, carrying their only possessions in the world. The door slams shut behind them, locks grating into place, and Will is trapped. The guys sitting around, playing cards, watching NatGeo on the shitty TV, talking amongst themselves, all look up when the new prisoners are brought through. Will can feel their eyes on him and he wishes to god he hadn’t had to shave for court.

Katz walks up and down the line, reading from her clipboard, pointing them to their cells. Will drifts, looking around instead of listening. The rec area is grey and a greyish blue, broken up only by the dark blue of the COs uniforms, and the lighter blue of the standard issue jumpsuits. If they were going for ‘depressing purgatory’ chic, they hit the nail on the head.

Zee grins at her when she reaches them and winks. “Take care of my boy here,” he says, nodding at Will.

Katz looks Will up and down and sighs. “Jesus fuck,” she says. “Someone’s got to stop putting guppies in with the piranhas. Zeller you’re in with Price, unless you wanna swap Graham out.”

“No way. You can’t put the fag in with baby face here. Price can’t protect him.”

Katz shrugs. “That, and you missed him,” she says.

Zee doesn’t bother to argue. Will doesn’t need an empathy disorder to see that there’s more than brotherly love between Zee and whoever Price is. He swallows down his fear and squares his shoulders. “I don’t care,” he says, firmly as he can.

“Yeah, you do,” Katz says. “That leaves Stammit, Lecter, and -“

“What happened to Multiple?” Zee interrupts adjusting his armful of blankets, underpants and TP.

“Miggs? Swallowed his tongue and choked to death.” Katz looks like she has something to add to the subject but is smart enough to keep it to herself. “Lecter’s got his cell to himself again.”

“Put Budge in with him and let Will bunk with Frankie. I mean, it’s not ideal, but it’s better than nothing.”

“Lecter and Budge?” Katz laughs, a humourless sound. “We’ve already fed four guys to Lecter’s crazy. If we put those two together there’ll be blood before break’s over.”

“Is there a problem here?” The head CO, Crawford appears out of nowhere. For a big guy he moves awful quietly.

“No sir,” Katz says and gives Zee a sharp look.

Zee doesn’t grin at Crawford but he shrugs when Crawford turns a disappointed look on him. “Sorry, boss,” he says. “I tried, but I just missed you too much to stay gone. I’ll get out of your hair.” He high-tails it off to a cell, familiar like the worn-in jumpsuit he wears.

Will is alone now.

“What’s the holdup?” Crawford asks. He takes Katz’s clipboard and scans it. “Graham.”

“He’s supposed to go in with Durnam,” Katz says. “I don’t think that’s a good idea.”

Crawford’s face is like stone. “So put him with Lecter.”

Katz glances over her shoulder and then visibly washes her hands of it. “On it, sir,” she says, and Will is taken away to meet Lecter and whatever crazy he has that’s caused him to lose four cellmates.

Chapter 2

The cell is empty. The bottom bunk is neatly made and there's a collection of books on the shelf, papers on the desk aligned at right angles. The cell is spotless, neatly arranged, and doesn't smell entirely of armpit and jockstrap, like the rest of the prison. Apparently his cellie bathes regularly, sleeps on the bottom bunk, and everyone is still scared of him. Will clambers up onto the top bunk and makes his bed, swallowing repeatedly, trying to keep the scream he's been keeping in since he was arrested from getting out.

Someone knocks on the open door and Zee pokes his head in, a guy who's probably Price following after him. Price looks like shit. He's obviously been in a fight or two, and lost, but he's not weighed down by it, he's too busy arguing with Zee about bullshit to care. They bicker like an old married couple but stop when they get into the cell.

Price looks Will up and down. "Ooh," he says. "I see what you mean. Jimmy Price," he adds, "vehicular manslaughter while blackout drunk. You've already met Brian, professional fuckup."

Will's smile feels forced. "Will Graham," he says. "I think I killed someone."

A voice over the PA system announces that rec time is over and everyone has limited time to get back to their cells.

There's an odd silence after that. "Drugs?" Price ventures.

Will shakes his head. "Untreated encephalitis. I got off lightly because I was medically out of my mind."

Zee pats him awkwardly on the shoulder. "Tough break."

"If you'll pardon me," someone says from outside the cell and both Zee and Price flinch and get out of the way.

"See you later!" Zee says to Will while Price tows him away, saying, "Sorry, just saying hello to Brian's friend. We'll get out of your…"

Whatever they'll get out of – his way, his hair, his cell – Will will never know, since they're too far away to hear. He looks up at his new roommate, gets as far as his mouth. "Hannibal Lecter," the mouth says, thin-lipped and sharp-toothed. "A pleasure to meet you."

The cell door slides shut. The sound of the electronic lock clicking into place is extremely loud.

It's darker in the cell, without the light from the main block coming through the door. Will looks at the rim of his glasses, pretending he's looking at Lecter.

"You, uh, okay with the," he waves a hand at the bunk, jaw clenching.

“I am,” Lecter says, still standing by the door. “There are some things you should know about me. I don’t tolerate rudeness, slovenly behaviour, or foul language. Please respect my privacy insofar as that is possible considering our conditions, and I will do the same for you.”

Will’s mouth is moving before he has a chance to think about what he’s saying. “So how does you sticking your cock up my ass not count as rude?” he asks.

He can see Lecter’s pale eyebrows rise. “I am not a rapist,” he says, calm and even. He has an accent that Will has to pay attention to, to catch what Lecter is saying. “I am also not fond of repeating myself. I understand you are frightened, but please do mind your language. My last cell-mate had the most appalling tongue.”

Will is abruptly reminded that Miggs, according to everyone else, swallowed his own tongue. He wonders how much Lecter had to do with it and from what he’s seen it’s probably a lot.

They stand in silence until Will blurts out his own name. Lecter extends his hand and Will manages to shake it without doing anything else to antagonize him. “A pleasure to meet you, Mr. Graham,” Lecter says. “I am sure we will get on famously.”His hand is warm and dry, and his nails are clean and neatly trimmed. His grip is firm, but he doesn’t try to crush Will’s hand. He doesn’t have to for Will to realize how strong he is.

Will rubs at the back of his neck. For a guy who’s so big on courtesy, Lecter doesn’t seem to care that Will can’t look him in the eye. “I uh,” he says, confused. “You can call me Will.”

“Hannibal then,” Lecter says, finally moving into the cell and sitting down at the miniscule desk. “I get a lot of mail,” he says, and Will hears the warning – don’t stick your nose where it isn’t wanted if you want to keep it – and the dismissal.

He clambers up onto the top bunk and lies on his back, staring at the cinderblock ceiling. Inmates have scraped their initials into the paint. Will traces his fingers over the gang signs and crude drawings of cocks. Between the awkwardness of getting onto the bunk and the graffiti above him, he can see why Hannibal doesn’t want to be on top, so to speak.

Will can hear the soft sound of paper rustling and the scratch of a pencil. Every so often Hannibal sighs. He sounds a lot like Will’s old TA used to, when he got a particularly stupid paper handed to him. Will misses his old life so much his guts cramp with longing. He curls onto his side and watches the muscles in Hannibal’s back and shoulders move under his thin, prison-issue t-shirt.

“They’re going to eat me alive out there,” Will says, quietly.

Hannibal folds up the letter he was working on, turns around and looks up at Will, leaning back in the chair so he doesn’t have to crane his neck. “Not quite,” he says, and he’s not smiling but he sounds like there’s a joke in there somewhere that Will is missing.

Will spends the entire night staring at the ceiling, awake. He thinks that maybe if he could cry it would help, but there's nothing in him. He's tired, he's scared, and he's got twenty years to go.

The next morning, when they're let out for breakfast, Will tries not to be too obvious about sticking close to Hannibal until he spots Zee and Price. Hannibal doesn't seem to notice his presence, or his absence, moving through the halls like it was his own idea, and not because he's being moved along by prison guards.

Zee yawns. He's got a hickey showing just under the collar of his jumpsuit and Price doesn't just look better, he looks smug. "How's Cannibal Lecter?" Zee says, and Will snorts out a laugh.

"Freudian slip?" he says.

Both men turn to stare at him with absolute horror on their faces. "No," Zee says. "I mean, Hannibal 'the cannibal' Lecter, is probably an actual cannibal. I mean, he got done for murder one. He's a lifer, but…"

Price hands them all trays as the line moves forward. "What's Brian is trying, and failing, to say, is that according to the courts Doctor Hannibal Lecter killed a man in cold blood. According to everyone else he was a serial killer who ate his victims but they can't prove it."

Will rolled his eyes. "So, basically, he's got good rumours protecting him?"

Zee grabbed his arm hard enough to hurt. "Listen man," he said. "Do not fuck with Lecter. Miggs swallowed his tongue. The guy before him slit his own throat. The guy before that ended up in the wack shack and never got let back out, and his first cellie gouged out his own eyes. I told you it's sharks in here, Graham. Well Hannibal's like a fucking Bond villain laser shark. He's smart, he's always hungry, and he'll swallow you whole if you let him. Get a transfer out of there, soon as you can."

"Articulate, as always," Hannibal says from behind them. He's quiet as a cat when he moves.

All the colour drains out of Zee's face. "Uh," he says.

"He's just trying to scare me," Will says. "You know, hazing."

Hannibal tips his head ever so slightly to the side and Will finally meets his eyes. They're brown, almost red, and there is absolutely nothing going on behind them. Will's empathy hits a brick wall. All he knows is that every instinct he has is telling him to run. He picks up a tray and hands it to Hannibal instead.

"What makes you think it isn't true?" Hannibal says smoothly. He carries on through the line and Will doesn't miss the fact that none of the other prisoners bother him. Not like Zee and Price, who are shoved by another inmate who's not happy with the pace they're moving at.

"Hey pretty girl." The inmate grabs Will's crotch, hard, as he passes. "You gonna suck my dick for me?"

Will stares at the rim of his glasses and lets Zee hustle him along the line. As far as he's seen, Hannibal was wrong. He's fucked.

Chapter 3

Will gets through a week without any real trouble. He does this by staying in the cell. Prisoners circle by but his hunch was right: no one wants to step foot in the cell of a cannibal. He drinks out of the tap and eats the crackers and jello cups that Zee and Price smuggle out of the mess for him. It's boring, it's so boring, and Will thinks he might go crazy long before someone has the chance to hurt him. He asks Hannibal if he might borrow a book.

They don't speak to one another. Hannibal seems content to ignore Will, carrying on about his day as though Will is a strange new piece of furniture someone left on the top bunk. But Hannibal doesn't seem surprised by Will's request. He gives Will an appraising look and then invites him to browse as he likes. Will still can't look at him, but he says thank you and picks one of the French titles because it's the only thing Hannibal has that Will might, possibly, be able to read. The rest are all in German, Russian, and possibly Japanese, Will isn't sure. It's slow going, his half-forgotten Cajun French stretched past breaking trying to get around the Count of Monte Cristo. Zee brings him a French-English dictionary from the Library, which helps.

On the eighth day, he wakes up to find Hannibal standing next to the bunk, their faces pretty much level, watching him. "I have been patient," he says. "I appreciate that this is difficult for you, but I must now insist you follow my rules."

"Rules?" Will asks, without much interest. "I'm not swearing, I'm not making a mess, I'm not being rude."

Hannibal's sigh is weary, long-suffering. "Will, you have night-sweats, you stink of fear, and it has been a week. Use the showers." He doesn't say, 'or else' but he doesn't have to. "You may use my soap. In fact, please, use my soap. What they provide here doesn't deserve that name and the smell is atrocious."

Hannibal doesn't wait for a reply. He's gone from the cell and Will understands that he has until Hannibal returns. Since he doesn't know when that will be, he has to go now.

He hasn't shaved since the doors to the outside world slammed shut behind him, but his face in the mirror over the sink is still too young-looking, still too pretty. He's aware that many people find him attractive – before he opens his mouth at least – but he's never been more aware of it than now. He puts his head down and his shoulders up and does what he has to do.

Hannibal's soap smells of cognac and mandarin. Will's scrubbing it out of his hair when he's shoved from behind. His face slams into the tiled wall and he slips, going down hard on his knees. He can't see, and there's blood in his mouth, a hand in his hair, and someone kicks him in the side. He can't curl up around himself with someone holding his hair like that, so he jerks in their grasp, gasping for air. He's shoved down, hitting his head on the floor this time, and he's finally able to draw enough breath to shout for help. He barely gets a sound out before his assailant kicks him in the side again.

He can't breathe. His nose is bleeding as well and he's choking on spit and blood, coughing onto the tiles. Rough hands are on his hips and he can feel someone kneel down behind him. Will tries to fight, throwing an elbow back, trying to head-butt the man. He gets his face smashed into the floor again for his trouble. Then those hands are spreading his buttocks and Will tries to scream but his cheek is pressed to the wet floor and he's half-drowning in water, half in his own blood and he can't breathe, he can't breathe.

The weight on his back disappears as suddenly as the attack began.

He rolls onto his side before he can sit up, scrambling to put his back against the wall. Hannibal and another man are struggling under the showerhead. Hannibal has the man pinned with his forearm across his throat and for one confused moment Will thinks they're kissing. Then Hannibal staggers back and blood follows.

The man screams, high and strange. Hannibal's mouth and chin are wet with blood, it drips down his bare chest and onto the floor. He chews for a moment before swallowing whatever he had in his mouth. His teeth are red when he bares them in something that might be a smile, or might be a snarl.

Will tips to the side and heaves up bile when he realizes Hannibal just tore another man's tongue out of his mouth and ate it.

Hannibal smashes the man's head against the tile, once, precise, and he drops to the ground, unconscious. He leaves them both on the floor while he rinses the blood off his face then he beckons Will closer. "Come here," he says, "let me see."

Will staggers to his feet. His knees feel like water, his stomach like knots. Hannibal tips his face up, smooths his thumbs gently over Will's nose and cheeks. His long fingers push through Will's hair, like a massage. Water streams into Will's eyes and he has to shut them. Let the cannibal clean the blood off his face. "Nothing broken," Hannibal says, pleased, hands skimming over Will's ribs."Open your eyes and follow my finger please." He moves it across Will's vision and smiles when Will can track it. "No concussion. You'll be bruised and swollen, but you'll live."

"Why are you helping me?" Will asks, his voice stuffed up and small.

Hannibal turns the water off and fastens a towel around his own waist and then one around Will's. He drapes another towel over Will's shoulders. "Would you like me to stop?" Hannibal asks.

Will's head is throbbing with pain and he just wants to get back to the cell and sleep forever. "No," he says and then, because he has to know, "Did you kill him?"

"What good is a lesson if one is not alive to learn it?" Hannibal asks. He stays with Will while they dress and then escorts him to the dining hall. "Sit," he says, pushing Will down at one of the tables. Will stares at the plastic table until a tray is placed in front of him. "Eat," Hannibal says. He sits next to Will rather than across from him.

Will opens the juice carton mechanically. "What do you want?"

“You used to be a profiler with the FBI, were you not?” he asks. Hannibal bites into an apple and all Will can think about is the man lying on the shower floor, without a tongue.

“Teacher, consultant,” Will corrects. He feels dizzy still and his stomach hurts. He can already feel the bruises starting to rise.

“Eat quickly,” Hannibal says. He takes Will’s roll and apple and tucks them into Will’s jumpsuit. “We’ll all wind up in-”

“Lockdown!” Crawford bellows. “Everyone back to their cells. Not you Lecter.”

The prisoners are herded out of the mess but when Will makes to follow them, Hannibal puts his hand around Will’s wrist and pins it to the table. “Eat,” he says again.

He can tell Crawford is all set to yell at them both, and that Will’s face is what changes his mind. “You want to tell me what happened?” he asks, wearily.

“About what?” Hannibal asks, as though butter wouldn’t melt in his mouth.

Will takes his chance. “Hannibal beat me,” he says, bowing his head.

Both men turn to look at him. “What?” Crawford says.

“I…” Will drags his spoon through congealing gravy. “I told him he was a lying cunt and I threw the first punch.”

“And where was this?”

“Cell,” Will mutters. “He shut me down, we talked it out, we came to an agreement. It won’t happen again, sir.”

Crawford’s face is a thundercloud. “You’re telling me neither of you were anywhere near the showers this morning? That no one here bit off someone else’s tongue?”

Will doesn’t have to fake his disgusted expression. “What?” he says. “Who the fuck does something like that”

“Anything to add to this, Lecter?” Crawford says.

Hannibal spreads his hands. “I’m afraid my temper rather got the best of me with dear Will. But as he says, the issue has been resolved.”

“I don’t know why you’re covering for him, Graham,” Crawford says. “But don’t make the mistake of thinking he’s your friend. You don’t make friends with the devil. Now get the fuck out of my sight, both of you.”

The next thing Will knows, he and Hannibal are locked in their cell and Hannibal is calmly sitting down at the desk, one leg crossed over the other. “I can protect you,” he says at last. “If you want me to.”

Will swallows down his fear. “And what would you want in return?” he says.

Hannibal considers this for a moment. “My mind stagnates in here,” he says at last. “You are interesting. You see killers so clearly you become them.”

“I was sick,” Will protests.

“You will remain in this cell unless I am accompanying you. I decide when and what you eat, when you sleep, when you bathe-”

“You want to experiment on me,” Will says. “On my empathy.”

Hannibal doesn’t deny it. “If at any time you wish to terminate our agreement, you may do so.”

Will wants to punch him in the face. “You planning on fucking my ass as well, or just my mind? If you’ll pardon my French.”

“You seem awfully certain I am homosexual.”

“You think it matters to me if you’re queer on the Outside, or if this is just situational?” Will grimaces, braces his hands against the bedframe, and lets his head hang down. “Don’t give me that bullshit. You want to see me use my ‘gift?’ You knew I’d get attacked the second I was alone. You followed me because you’re an overconfident prick who thinks he can do anything he wants. What if there had been more than one guy? You think you can fight them all off? Or would you have left me there?”

“I would have let you be gang raped, if that’s what you’re asking, yes. And the offer of protection would still be the same.”

“My hero,” Will says, bitterly. “You don’t even have to set me up, you just get to walk in, eat a guy’s fucking face off, and get me to agree to whatever you want.”

Hannibal gets up and stands directly behind Will. He puts his hands on either side of Will’s, hemming him in. “Are you trying to antagonize me?” he asks, low and dangerous, his mouth very close to Will’s ear.

Will desperately wants to fight, and scream, and draw blood and he can’t keep still and control his mouth at the same time. “Why?” he hears himself say. “Is it turning you on?”

“No,” Hannibal says, and his teeth close over Will’s earlobe. His hips press against Will’s ass, but he isn’t hard.

Will goes very still because he is very aware that Hannibal has mutilated several other inmates and the odds of him hesitating to do the same to Will are very low. “I’m sorry,” he says. “I’ll stop swearing.”

His breath comes out shakily when Hannibal lets go. “It’s the rudeness I can’t stand,” Hannibal says. He puts a hand around Will’s throat and tightens his grip just enough to restrict his air supply but not completely cut it off. “You will cease to deliberately test my

patience, and if you would like me to sodomize you, you may ask for it politely, like everything else."

To Will's utter humiliation, even though Hannibal is still not aroused, he can feel his own dick hardening. It's been so long since someone touched him, other than pat down, strip searches, and this recent assault. Hannibal inhales and Will realizes he's smelling him.

"I see," Hannibal says, his other hand snaking over the fastenings of Will's jumpsuit. "Are you homophobic, Will? Does the thought of being penetrated disgust you irrationally?"

Will shakes his head. His voice is caught somewhere in his throat and it hurts to swallow, Hannibal's hand still carefully controlling his air. The fabric gapes open at the front exposing his tee and shorts. His erection is obvious.

"Studies have shown," Hannibal continues mildly, "that the more violent the homophobia, the greater the homosexual tendencies the subject is trying to conceal. Self-loathing turned outwards. Is that you, Will?" He doesn't touch Will's skin beyond the knuckles of his hand brushing Will's stomach for a short moment, as he pulls Will's shorts down, tucking the elastic under his testicles so he's exposed, displayed.

"No," Will gasps.

"No, what?" Hannibal says, hand tightening in warning. For a second, Will can't breathe at all, and then Hannibal eases up. "No you are not homophobic, no you are not homosexual, or is that a request for me to stop?"

He doesn't wait for Will's answer. Clearly he enjoys the sound of his own voice. "Or is it that violence arouses you? Do you like to be hurt? Is it the thought that you might be forced, that I might ignore your pleas? Tell me, Will Graham, what is it that's making you leak all over yourself?"

Will can't find his voice. Not even when Hannibal chokes him again. All he can do is hold on, white-knuckled to the bed frame, crimson with shame. Finally Hannibal releases him, steps back, and Will feels unmoored.

"Let me know your decision," Hannibal says. He sits down at the desk and begins sorting through his mail.

"Alright," Will says in a harsh whisper. Hannibal is terrifying in his inscrutability, he's terrifying in his capacity for violence but without his help, Will won't make it another week. "You have a deal."

"Very well," Hannibal says, without turning around. Will waits for something else, but Hannibal just sharpens his pencil and begins to write a reply.

Will pulls up his shorts with shaking hands and crawls up onto his bunk. He curls up as small as he can, presses his face into the pillow and screams. Will shoves his hands into his shorts and starts jerking himself. He is wet already, precum smearing down the length of his cock.

“No, Will,” Hannibal says, still without turning around. “If you want something, you must ask.”

Will hasn’t had an erection in months. Between the nightmares, the insomnia, the meds, being on trial for murder…it’s not been very stimulating. Now if feels like his body is making up for all that time. He aches.

“You won’t like what I do if you disobey me,” Hannibal says.

Will pulls his hands away and fists them in the sheets so he won’t touch himself. The words stick in his mouth. “Please may I jerk…” he spits out, then reconsiders. “May I masturbate, please.”

Hannibal finally turns around. Will can feel his gaze, like it’s a touch, on his back. “Why?”

Because I’m hard, you evil motherfucker, Will doesn’t say. “I don’t know,” he spits out. “Not…it’s not pain.”

“Roll onto your back please,” Hannibal says, standing.

Will doesn’t bother to argue. Without even the pressure of the mattress on his cock, Will can’t help the little twitches his hips make. Hannibal presses down on his stomach, right where the bruises are forming. Even through his shorts the way his cock jerks is visible.

“Are you certain?” Hannibal asks, smug.

“You’re a sadist,” Will says from between clenched teeth. “That’s why you went into med school, that’s why you became a shrink. You’re more controlled than a psychopath and more dangerous than a sociopath. They’re not rumours, you’ve eaten people. Jesus, you’re a fucking cannibal, and a serial killer, and they don’t know.”

“Are you trying to appeal to my vanity?” Hannibal asks. “Or demonstrate your value?”

Will digs his head into the pillow beneath him. “Yes,” he says.

“Very well,” Hannibal says. “You are allowed to touch yourself. On the condition that you tell me what you’re thinking about while you do so.”

“I- I get inside killers.” Will slips one hand back inside his shorts, cupping his dick. “I can’t tell if this is turning me on because I like it, or because you like it and I’m echoing you. It’s frightening, but I’m so messed up right now. Everything hurts. It just, it’s all crossed wires and it’s making me harder.”

Hannibal has the nerve to look openly intrigued. Will expects questions but all he says is, “Take your penis out.”

Will kicks his shorts off, why the fuck not, and wraps his hand more comfortably around himself. “Now I’m thinking about medically correct anatomy terminology as a substitute for talking dirty. If you ever say things like cock, or fuck, or if it’s all manual stimulation and

sodomy." His face hurts, where it was smashed against tile. His stomach and ribs ache too. He has a headache.

But Hannibal…Hannibal feels glorious, like he hasn't done in almost a year. Hannibal just ate another man's tongue and no one ever stops him. He's got an FBI special agent to lie for him, to submit to him, and no one will stop him here, either. He's not sure if having so much control over someone will stay amusing, or if he will grow weary of it, but for now he can make this beautiful mess of disorders and despair crawl if he so wishes. And for now he is amused.

Will shudders with Hannibal's desire. "If you tell me what to do," Will gasps, stroking himself far more slowly than he usually would, but tighter. It hurts, just a little. "If you tell me, then you get the satisfaction of forcing me, without forcing me. But making me do it myself means you get the satisfaction of my discomfort."

For a moment Hannibal looks surprised. "What a strange gift you have, Will," he says and puts his hand over Will's throat again. The bunk is high enough that his arm rests on Will's chest, elbow digging into a rib. "I suppose we shall have to experiment and see."

Will's cock jerks out a thick bead of precum. "Oh, shit," he whispers and then Hannibal's hand is crushing down and he can't choke out a scream when Hannibal digs his fingers into a nerve cluster in his thigh.

"Language," Hannibal says.

Will gasps for breath. He's so close and he's barely touching himself at all, just holding on, tugging with little spasms of his hand. He turns his face to look directly at Hannibal, whose eyes look black in the low light of the cell. "Can you enjoy the sadism if my empathy means that I enjoy it, too?" He's laughing, a little hysterical, mostly hiccoughs of air.

Hannibal, with far more grace than seems fair, climbs onto the bunk and kneels over Will. He's bent nearly in half so he doesn't smack his head on the ceiling but it doesn't make him look ridiculous, it just means Will is within biting distance. Hannibal puts his full weight on Will's throat, choking him in earnest, now. Hannibal's other hand digs into the bruises covering Will's ribs.

The feedback loop of emotions doesn't prevent Will from fearing for his life. He struggles under Hannibal and his moan is choked into silence when Hannibal kisses him. His teeth close over Will's tongue and Will comes, and comes what feels like a second time when Hannibal lets go of his throat. He coughs, gasping, riding on adrenaline and endorphins.

Hannibal's smile is predatory. "Yes," he says, still crouching over Will's chest like a nightmare.

"What?" Will's heart thunders unsteadily. He's not sure if what he's feeling is relief or shame.

"Yes, I can still enjoy it," Hannibal says. "You need another shower," he says and Will closes his eyes so he doesn't have to see Hannibal's razor slash of a smile any more.

Will startles in surprise when Hannibal just climbs down from the bunk, hands dusting over his knees like they're suit pants and not just a prison issue jumpsuit. Will can hear him moving around, settling back down at the desk. He opens his eyes.

"Aren't you…"

"No," Hannibal says. "I am not going to and that is the very last time I will repeat myself."

It is possible Hannibal has his own line he won't cross, and so is sitting there with a hard-on, ignoring it. It is also possible that Hannibal isn't hard because he, for whatever reason, doesn't find Will and/or the violence arousing. Or because he only gets off when he's killing someone.

Will reaches out and snags a roll of TP off the little shelf on the wall. He cleans the come off his stomach and dick and gets dressed again. "How many people have you killed?" he asks.

"I don't have a paraphilia," Hannibal says, with irritation.

"Anthropophagolagnia," Will mutters and Hannibal relaxes a little, turning around with an expression that might be termed fond.

"Correct term, but not for me," he says. "I'm pleased to see you are as smart as I expected. But now I want you to lie down. You're over-tired Will. It's been a stressful morning for you. Sleep now, and I'll wake you when it's rec."

Will hopes to god Hannibal isn't lying and his crimes weren't sexually motivated. He doesn't think he could stand enjoying his own rape. "We're in lockdown," he says, but he does as Hannibal said, tugging the blanket up over his chest.

"They'll let us out for rec," Hannibal says. "Crawford won't risk the lowered morale."

He doesn't sound as though he intends to do Will any harm in the next hour or so. Will stares up at the ceiling. Hannibal was right about one thing, he is exhausted. He's about to crash and he really wishes he had his dogs with him. He feels cold and disconnected. After a few minutes he realizes he's shaking.

"You may sleep in my bunk," Hannibal says, as frustratingly calm as always. "I won't make you ask this time."

Will stays where he is for another few minutes, but his headache is coming back, and he hurts like he's been bruised in his soul as well as his body. He climbs into Hannibal's bunk, burning with shame. It's equally uncomfortable as his own, but the pillow smells like Hannibal's shampoo, and the blanket smells like soap and sweat. His shoulders relax and the headache recedes.

"Ça va?" Hannibal says, resting his left hand casually on Will's hair, thumb rubbing circles near Will's temple.

"Oui, ça va," Will says. The shaking stops and he has a moment to be amazed at his own traitorous body before he falls asleep.

Chapter 4

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The days all blur together in an endless parade of low-grade terror and following Hannibal around. It's still better than being stuck in the cell though, and Hannibal doesn't seem to care if he talks to Zee, Price, or any of the other nobodies on the block. He is happy enough to occupy himself with his letters, or his drawings while Will plays cards and shoots the shit. It's easy to fall into Hannibal's routine.

Will is surprised that Hannibal doesn't complain about the food. When he gets up the nerve to say so, Hannibal just continues mechanically working his way through the powdered scrambled eggs. "Our fortunes rise and fall," he says. "I know what it is like to be hungry."

Will's coffee is practically sludge there's so much sugar in it. It still tastes like shit. "Doesn't make this taste any better," Will points out. "May I skip the apple?"

"No," Hannibal says, but he's not really paying attention any more.

The next day Hannibal grumbles through breakfast. And the next day. And again until it becomes part of the routine. Only at breakfast will Hannibal mutter about dietary requirements and the kitchen detail's inability to do anything with bacon other than burn it. The other meals he eats without a word on the subject.

His complaints about the food are as infinite as the stars, but he most frequently laments his inability to feed Will properly. Will wonders if Hannibal was lonely before he arrived but he keeps his mouth shut. He likes Hannibal in the mornings because Hannibal is not a morning person. He puts on a good show, but until he gets a cup of coffee in him, he's useless. Will likes it because Hannibal is frequently frightening, but every morning Will is reminded that Hannibal Lecter is also bored, and tired of prison food, and would happily kill a man for a decent meal – in his case a little more literally than other prisoners, but still – and he drinks his shitty prison coffee with sugar and milk to mask the taste just like everyone else.

Hannibal's surprising strength comes from a daily exercise routine that he sticks to religiously. His dead lift is impressive. Will tries not to wonder how many dead bodies he carried to build up that sort of muscle and why he feels the need to keep it up now.

Since Hannibal likes controlling what Will eats, how he exercises, how much water he drinks, he adapts his own routine for Will's faster metabolism and smaller build. Will obliges because there is fuck all else to do. He can't tell if Hannibal's into it because it feeds his god complex, or if he's looking to feed something else, once Will's body is to his liking.

While they work out, Will tries to remember cases he'd heard of where there was suspected cannibalism, but he can't. Eventually it'll click into place though. He'll figure out what Hannibal is. Every little bit of information Hannibal lets slip is something else to add to the profile.

But mostly the exercise helps empty his mind. Hannibal's routine is grueling and when he's finished Will shakes like a newborn foal. He kneels on the tiles, face pressed against Hannibal's thigh, and lets Hannibal wash his hair. When he feels like he can stand again he props himself up against the wall under the showerhead with equally unsteady arms and lets Hannibal bathe him. At first it's humiliating, he feels like one of his own strays, but he soon learns to ignore the catcalls from other prisoners. His submission makes Hannibal look stronger, and the stronger Hannibal appears, the less likely anyone is to bother them. It's also embarrassingly good.

He doesn't like being touched, most of the time. It's hard for him to welcome others into his personal space, but Hannibal doesn't recognize it. He looms, he stands too close, he is physical in a way that usually makes Will want to run for the hills. But he touches Will firmly, with purpose, and fairly clinically, all things considered. It's not stressful. There are no uncertainties or questions in his touch. If he wants something from Will, he will let him know. If Will wants something, all he has to do is ask.

It's probably the simplest relationship Will has ever had.

It's also been a few weeks since Hannibal watched Will jerk off and Will hasn't been able to ask again. It's too much, to have to ask.

He only tries doing it without Hannibal's permission once. Hannibal drags him off the bunk and makes him stay in the Murga position until he collapses. It takes over an hour and afterwards he can't get up again. Hannibal lifts him into his own bunk and lets Will sleep against his chest. Will doesn't try disobeying Hannibal a second time.

It's not easy to forget about such things since Hannibal likes to ask him invasive, personal questions. Usually in the mess at the evening meal so he's thinking about sex when they're locked into their cell. It's clever, Will's willing to give Hannibal that one, but it doesn't make his celibacy any easier.

"Do you ever penetrate yourself digitally, or with sex aides while masturbating?" Hannibal asks, pausing between bites of meat that probably came out of a can.

"Once. I didn't like it," Will says. He doesn't try to lower his voice. He learned that lesson the hard way as well. "It hurt."

"Do you enjoy anal sex with women?"

Will bites out a laugh. "I don't have a lot of sex, Hannibal. Most women require eye contact before they agree to fuck you."

"That's not a no," Hannibal points out.

"No, I don't have anal sex, with women, with myself, with the mailman, no one. I know it's one of those things everyone talks about, like the holy grail of sex." Will stabs his green beans vengefully. "At the fundamental level it's about breaking taboo, power, dominance. I see a lot of those things in my line of work, but in really ugly ways. So when I think about it I think about it, it all gets confused and that frightens me."

“Because you see yourself as an aggressor?”

Will stuffs the beans into his mouth so he doesn’t have to answer right away. But Hannibal is patient as a mountain. “Sometimes,” Will mumbles.

Hannibal, the prick, doesn’t hesitate. “And the rest of the time?”

“I’m a victim.”

Hannibal’s fairly inscrutable, but even Will can tell he’s pleased with himself. “Does that truly frighten you? Or does the fact that it arouses you, frighten you?”

“The thought of being murdered doesn’t get me hot, no,” Will snaps.

“We’re not talking about murder,” Hannibal says. “We’re talking about fucking.”

Will’s entire face goes pink. “Language,” he says but he hasn’t been laid in forever, and he just really wants to get off, and his stupid, traitorous dick heard the word ‘fucking’ in Hannibal’s clipped English and now he’s hard. The look on Hannibal’s face says he knows it, too.

“When…after count, may I-“

Hannibal doesn’t bother to let him finish. “No,” he says. Will slumps in his seat because he honestly thought that maybe, if he asked in public, if he gave Hannibal that humiliation, Hannibal would say yes.

Will stews until the cell doors lock behind them and then Hannibal is waving an imperious hand and demanding he strip. “You may have something else,” he says.

Will, despite all Hannibal’s awful attributes, trusts Hannibal not to fuck him without permission. So he gets naked embarrassingly quickly and lies on Hannibal’s bunk as instructed. He’s hoping for a quick hand-job.

He is not expecting Hannibal to suck him until he wants to cry.

Will pulls his own hair and presses up against Hannibal’s hands, holding his hips down. Twice he is on the precipice of coming and Hannibal pulls away, easing him back from the edge. The third time, Will says, “Please, Jesus, Hannibal, please let me. I need – may I?” Hannibal presses two fingers against his perineum, swallows Will back down, and Will comes so hard he thinks he might actually black out for a moment.

He comes back to himself, watching Hannibal rinse out his mouth, and he can see that Hannibal is hard. For a second that feels like an hour Will gets caught up in the Gordian knot of their relationship. If he offers to give Hannibal a hand, Hannibal might say yes, because he has put Will in a position where it would be a pretty dick move not to offer. He might say no, just to prove that he is still in charge. But if he knows Will thinks like this, then doesn’t that mean both those options will mean the opposite. It hurts his head.

“Here,” Hannibal says, like an offering. He pushes Will onto his side and lies down behind him. “Press your thighs together,” he says, and Will does, because he’s got about that much energy left in his body and no more.

He drifts, Hannibal’s cock sliding between his thighs, rocking him with each thrust. If he wasn’t so tired, Will suspects he might actually get hard again. “You’re nice to me,” Will hears himself say. “I wasn’t expecting that.”

Hannibal bites the back of his shoulder hard enough to draw blood and comes.

It’s only as Hannibal’s pressing sticky fingers to Will’s lips, and Will is licking Hannibal’s come off his hand, that Will sees how blatantly he’s been manoeuvered.

###

“I don’t appreciate being played,” Will says, over breakfast.

Hannibal’s eyebrows lift fractionally. “No?” he says. “I don’t recall you asking me to stop.”

“Yeah, well,” Will says. “I don’t recall consenting. Yes means yes, Hannibal.”

“Tu aurais préféré que je ne te suce pas?” Hannibal asks.

Will’s shoulder aches. He wants to rub it but he won’t give Hannibal the satisfaction. “It’s considered good form to ask a man for his permission before you put his dick in your mouth.”

Hannibal’s face looks like a mask in the next moment. There is no expression there at all and in the fluorescent lighting of the mess Hannibal’s eyes are the flat dead stare of a shark. No expression, just hunger. He is looking at someone behind Will. Will’s skin crawls but he doesn’t turn around to see, especially when Hannibal smiles at whoever is watching them, takes some of Will’s bacon with his fingers and bites the rasher in half. It’s a warning and a threat. Whoever is behind Will, obviously turns their attention elsewhere because Hannibal relaxes slightly.

“Don’t ever talk to me like that,” Hannibal says later. They sit down in the rec area and Hannibal sets up his Go board. Will sighs and stirs his markers with a finger. He’s not especially good at the game, but he’s improving. “I am serious, Will. If you make reference to sexual acts where I was not the dominant partner then we will find ourselves in fights with other inmates.”

“Oh yeah,” Will mutters, “I was in total control of that experience.”

Hannibal’s mouth quirks up, like he’s trying not to be pleased by that comment. “Nevertheless,” he says and puts a marker on the board.

After Will has lost enough games that he feels like he ought to have learned something from the experience, Hannibal settles into his chair and closes his eyes. It’s something he does sometimes. He sits very still and closes his eyes, and though he is not asleep, he is

somewhere far away. Will stays by his side when that happens and he's not sure who's protecting whom.

He's doing just that, having been joined by Zee, Price, and two old lifers – Hart and Mellori. It feels a little bit like a group date for couples, even if Hannibal's off in his mind palace.

"It's weird," Mellori says. "Can he hear us?"

"I have no idea," Will says. "Say something fucking stupid and find out."

They're interrupted by the arrival of a new prisoner. Price makes an exaggerated surprise-face. "Well statistically unlikeliness be damned. Looks like there's two cannibals in A-block."

Hannibal doesn't react, so Will figures he can't actually hear them. Not something he'd be willing to bet his life on, but still. Will shrugs. "Got any threes?" Price shakes his head and Will goes fish.

"They say the entire house was filled with remains. Like, in the cushions, in the walls, in their dinner," Zee says. "Killed a bunch of girls that looked like his daughter, ate them, and then when the feds closed in he killed his wife and then the daughter, then he was dog-piled by agents."

Hart leans in a little and lowers his voice. "It's not him I would be concerned about, were I you," he says to Will. "The Woods have their eye on you. Do you have any threes?"

Will gives up his threes with annoyance. "Hannibal doesn't share," he says. "I don't think he's going to rent me out to white-trash neo-nazis."

"Don't you know they got beef with Lecter, or vise versa?" Zee says, knee bouncing under the table. "Lecter and Andrews– the head of the Woods you dumb fuck – got into it when Lecter first got here. Lecter took a chunk out of him before they got split up and disappeared into the SCU for a few weeks. Andrews got a shitload of stitches and an ugly ass scar on his cheek to show for it. They ain't jumped Lecter yet because Andrews got three strikes violence and they sent him down for a month. He gets back in a few days. You better get armed or get fast. There's gonna be blood in the water soon. Better pray it ain't you."

"What's your problem with the Woods?" Will asks, later that night

"Nazi bastards," Hannibal snarls with genuine anger. Will doesn't speak whatever language Hannibal is speaking, but he knows cursing when he hears it. Hannibal throws the shirt he was holding onto the bed. He is enraged, but there is no outlet. Through the lens of Will's empathy, Hannibal is a towering creature and they have locked him in with it. "Of course they want to take you," Hannibal says. "They see something that is beautiful and good and they aim to destroy it."

Most nights Will dreams of Hannibal. Sometimes Hannibal is as he was in the showers that day, breathing hard, face wet with blood, swallowing human flesh but in his dreams it's his tongue Hannibal has consumed. Or sometimes Will's ribs are cracked open and Hannibal

crouches over him, devouring his organs. A stag with feathers stalks him and Will runs like prey but can't outpace it. Will doesn't know if they count as nightmares since he wakes up shaking in fear, and painfully hard.

That sickening mixture of fear and arousal hits him now. Will feels petrified but his mind races ahead, deconstructing Hannibal like a crime scene. "You lost someone," Will says. "Someone under your protection. You would have been young."

"I suggest you stop talking," Hannibal says.

"Whatever you are, whatever you've done…"

He's totally unsurprised when Hannibal slams him against the wall with a forearm over his throat. "You are trying my patience," Hannibal says.

"It's no excuse," Will says, grabbing hold of Hannibal's vest. "You don't get to be a monster because something bad happened."

Hannibal's grip doesn't ease up. "My dear, what do you know of monsters?"

Will's laugh is jagged and bitter. "Everything," he says. "Eventually I know everything and I know that when you were born they handed you to your mother, and they told her she had a son, but they were wrong, Hannibal. They handed her a creature made of shadows and lies that consumes everything it touches. Someone along the way fed it with cruelty and privation and made it grow, but you were never going to be a good man. It's my job, and my…gift to understand people like you, Hannibal Lecter."

Hannibal eases up, fractionally. "You are a curious mess, aren't you?"

"That's me," Will says. "Now, I'm going to blow you because there is something wrong with me and it seems like a good idea right this second. When I'm done I'm kind of hoping you'll return the favour because I slept like a dead man last night."

"I…" Hannibal, for once, seems at a loss for words.

Will can't quite meet his eyes but he manages a real smile. "You're big, Hannibal, but I'm not going to be able to reach from up here." When Hannibal relaxes his hold, Will goes to his knees.

"Yes?" Will asks, hands on the fastenings of Hannibal's pants.

Hannibal smirks down at him. "Yes," he says. "I'm sure we can work something out."

Will doesn't exactly consider himself a connoisseur of cocks. For starters, he dates women. When he can. When the blinding light of his awkwardness doesn't scare them away. He's watched porn, which has plenty of cock, but in real life he's only seen the odd one here and there in locker rooms; most of the dicks he saw were attached to a corpse. Not exactly stimulating material. So he really didn't have much basis of comparison, but if all guys are Hannibal's size then he has some serious respect for everyone who has ever sucked a dick.

Hannibal’s hands cradle his skull as he fucks Will’s mouth. Not hard, but long smooth strokes that push down Will’s throat. He gags around Hannibal’s cock, eyes watering involuntarily, spit leaking down his chin and Hannibal stares down at him with utter curiosity. Will fists his hands into the fabric of his own pants so he doesn’t grab at Hannibal’s hips or wrists. His nose runs helplessly and he can barely breathe even when Hannibal isn’t stuffed down his throat.

He retches, coughing, and starts to panic. Hannibal holds his head steady, choking him with his cock and doesn’t pull back again.

“Breathe, darling boy,” Hannibal says. “Through your nose.”

Will makes a shameful sound somewhere between a keen and a whimper and Hannibal pushes him off. He collapses down at Hannibal’s feet, wiping his face with his sleeve, gasping.

“We’ll work on that,” Hannibal says, like a kindness. “Take off your clothes and get up on the bed. Put your pillow under your hips.”

Will gets unsteadily to his feet and does as he’s told. He’s not expecting Hannibal to hitch up his pants and settle into the chair, watching him.

“Go ahead,” Hannibal says.

Will isn’t a hundred percent sure what Hannibal wants, but he can take a pretty good stab at it. His face feels crimson with mortification, but he adjusts the pillow underneath him, slowly rolling his hips against the worn-soft fabric. There’s not enough friction to get him off but he supposes that’s not really the purpose of this exercise anyway. He hangs his head between his shoulders and stares at the metal frame of the bunk. Hannibal’s gaze is like a weight on him. He feels slutty and cheap. What’s worse, is that he likes it, just a little bit. Prison is difficult for him; there’s no open spaces, too many people, too much strong emotion battering at him. But in this moment, in this cell, all he has to do is what Hannibal asks of him.

Hannibal watches him dispassionately until the sweat is beading at Will's hairline and his dick feels sore from the scratch of the pillowcase. Then he's on the bed behind Will, shouldering his thighs apart and Will yelps when Hannibal's mouth presses against his hole. Hannibal's tongue teases him open and Will presses his face to the mattress to smother a groan. Hannibal's thumbs press against his perineum and Will reaches back, unable to catch hold of Hannibal.

"Please," he gasps, not even sure what he's asking for, and even less sure that he wants it from Hannibal.

Hannibal pushes a finger into him and Will's entire body clenches. There's a 'no' caught somewhere in his throat but Hannibal pulls back enough to say, "Relax, you'll like this," and then he spits directly onto Will's hole and slides another finger in, licking at Will's stretched rim, rubbing gently against Will's prostate.

"This is exactly the opposite of what I meant when we had that talk about yes meaning yes," Will gasps. Hannibal's smirking, he can feel it pressed against his skin. Will grinds his fists against his eyelids until he sees stars.

"Would you like me to stop?" Hannibal asks and bites the meat of Will's ass, fingers crooking just right to make Will's arms feel like water.

He spreads his legs, shoulders down and shakes his head. "No," he says but Hannibal is pulling away, sitting so his back is against the wall of their cell.

Hannibal motions for Will to get up and settles him across his lap, knees on either side of his hips. He pushes his fingers back inside Will and fucks him with them until Will is clinging to him, panting against his shoulder. His cock is leaking a steady stream of something that isn't precome, but isn't come either. There's a wet spot on the pillow where he was lying and now it's smearing all over Hannibal's stomach.

"Whenever you like," Hannibal says, and Will jerks his cock and comes with Hannibal's fingers inside him, moaning curses.

He's still shaking when Hannibal pulls his fingers free and eases Will back. The hand on his head is heavy and Will knows what he's expected to do. Blowing Hannibal isn't any easier when he's relaxed from orgasm, but Hannibal doesn't seem to mind that he's not contributing much to the process. He uses his grip on Will's hair to fuck his mouth and if anything, Will's helpless choking seems to do it for him. Will coughs most of Hannibal's come back onto his stomach and cock.

Hannibal lets him rest for a moment, head on his thigh, trying to catch his breath. Will licks him clean, cock, belly, chest, rough hair rasping against his tongue and Hannibal strokes his hair like he's a dog.

"May I sleep here?" Will asks, before he loses his nerve.

Hannibal doesn't answer, just rearranges them so Will is lying tucked up in the curve of his body, back to Hannibal's chest.

They both sleep like dead men.

Chapter End Notes

What Hannibal says (I hope): Tu aurais préféré que je ne te suce pas?
So, you would prefer if I didn’t suck your cock?

Chapter 5

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Hannibal wakes up screaming, a high, raw sound.

Will nearly does himself an injury trying to hold Hannibal down. Hannibal struggles, confused and disorientated, but Will rides it out, whispering, “Please let me help you,” until Hannibal goes still. They stay for a moment like that. Will sitting on Hannibal’s thighs, clutching Hannibal’s wrists held between their bodies, foreheads pressed together.

One of the screws bangs his nightstick on the cell door. "Keep it down, Lecter," he calls.

Will sits back, heart hammering in his chest. Hannibal is already stone-faced but he can feel Hannibal's pulse racing. He's pretty sure that anything he says right now will set Hannibal off so he stays silent, letting go when Hannibal rotates his wrists in Will's grasp.

He feels pinned in place by Hannibal's flat stare. It's always too hot in the cell, keeping the temperature raised is supposed to keep inmates quiet - the same way that malls pacify their patrons - but there's a chill crawling over his body. Muscles tick without his say-so and Hannibal's gaze sharpens: the predator seeing his prey. Will braces for pain, but Hannibal sighs and brushes a curl back from Will's face. "Fetch your book," he says with as much dignity as he can muster. Will can't make sense of it. "I should like to read to you," Hannibal adds and Will is up and off the bed before he can really think about it.

Will drags his bedding down so there’s something comfortable for Hannibal to sit up against, gets down the book he's working through, while Hannibal settles, and then sits with his back to Hannibal’s chest, turning the pages whenever Hannibal requires it. His voice runs smoothly in French the way it doesn’t in English.

“’…pourquoi me fais-tu demander la permission d'entrer chez moi? N'es-tu plus mon maître, ne suis-je plus ton esclave?’"

Will can feel Hannibal's heart beating but already it has settled. Hannibal is warm and Will resents that he sleeps better with a cannibal and a serial killer than he ever has alone. He wants to hurt Hannibal somehow, but he's not sure if those are his feelings, or some strange reflection of Hannibal's own. Hannibal's motives are clear enough, but his emotions are complicated and blunted at the same time.

It's four in the morning. Will decides he'll worry about it at a more reasonable hour. He lets Hannibal's voice soothe him into a light doze.

“Monte-Cristo sourit à son tour. ‘Haydée, dit-il, vous savez....’

“’Pourquoi ne me dis-tu pas tu comme d'habitude?’

“It’s strange. English has so many words for such specific things, but nothing that can translate such a thing,” Hannibal remarks. “’Why do you speak to me so coldly,’ is perhaps as close as the English language can come.”

Will hums absently then says, “She speaks to him informally while calling herself his slave. That’s weird, right?”

“You call me Hannibal,” Hannibal says. “Not Doctor Lecter.”

“If we spoke French then you would have me call you ‘vous,’” Will says. “N'êtes-vous plus mon maître, ne suis-je plus votre esclave?”

“Perhaps,” Hannibal says.

“Besides you were struck off,” Will says, cheekily.

He wakes up the next morning with Hannibal still wrapped around him. They've migrated down the bed so they're not sitting up any more, Will underneath Hannibal's not insignificant weight. Will shoves at Hannibal until he moves, grumbling under his breath, not really awake until he suddenly is. They both freeze, Hannibal grabbing Will's wrist so hard it hurts and Will halfway out of the bed. Then Hannibal lets go, relaxing again, and politely watches the underside of Will's bunk as Will takes a piss and washes his face.

"Zee says Andrews is getting out of solitary," Will says. His hair won't settle, no matter how he combs it. It's not sex hair, exactly, but it's not far off.

Hannibal sits on the edge of the bed, thumbing sleep out of one eye. "I know," he says calmly. Hannibal has sex hair. His accent is much thicker in the mornings and he has none of his usual grace as he moves through his morning ablations.

It's not until the cell is unlocked for breakfast that Will can really smell them both. They reek of sweat and come. Hannibal's smirking, Will can see it in the way the skin around his eyes crinkles, just a little.

Hannibal drinks the terrible coffee and complains about the consistency of the eggs. Will lets Hannibal drink his cup of coffee too so Hannibal is actually awake when Andrews walks into the mess.

When Zee said Hannibal had taken a chunk out of him, he hadn’t been exaggerating. If anything, he had downplayed how badly Andrews was scarred. The flesh of his cheek and jaw had been ripped out – by Hannibal’s teeth, if rumour was correct; and by the shape rumour was probably right – and so the skin was sunken in against his teeth and jaw.

Hannibal sipped at Will's coffee, one eyebrow quirking up. "Judging by the expression on your face, Andrews' looks haven't improved." He is confident, casual, but Will thinks of Hannibal's expression that night, frightened, seeing something from his past. Whatever it was, the Woods are going to be a problem.

Will figures he should probably take Zee's advice: get armed or get fast, and there's nowhere to run.

"If you are concerned for your safety," Hannibal says, like he's reading Will's mind, as Andrews circles around so Hannibal can see him, "then I will keep my distance. There is no need to involve yourself in my quarrels. Likely there will be violence."

There's more going on than Hannibal is admitting. Will watches him for a moment and realizes that Hannibal is actually trying to protect him. It's both patronizing, and weirdly nice of Hannibal.

Will thinks about letting Hannibal deal with his own shit. He could call the whole thing off, and it was entirely possible that the Woods would kill Hannibal. Which, when he thought about it, didn't actually seem like it would solve any problems. He shrugs. "And risk missing out on being manipulated and jerked around?" he says sweetly.

Now to the side of them, Andrews makes eye contact with Hannibal and draws his thumb across his throat in a clear threat.

Hannibal smiles at him, sharp, crooked teeth visible.

Will turns too, and sees the moment Andrews notices him; sees him as leverage, as prey.

Will lets the worst of the criminals he's chased or caught move through him. The Westbridge Strangler pulls his mouth into a smile, and he gives Mathews a jaunty little wave from the Colombia Co-ed killer. The Chesapeake Ripper sits behind his eyes, uncaught, not quite understood, but walking through his mind all the same.

Andrews walks away.

###

That evening, Price sidles up to Will in front of the sinks in the shower area while Will is staring into the mirror, trying to see himself in his own reflection. There are monsters in his head and now that the danger has passed, Will feels slightly sick.

"Where's Lecter?" Price asks, looking around nervously.

Will scrubs a hand over his beard. It's coming in nicely. He's seen Hannibal giving him speculative looks, but so far he hasn't expressed an opinion about it one way or the other. "Washing his hair," Will says, not actually joking. "I need a favour."

Price shakes his head, but Will can tell it's not a 'no.' He meets Will's eyes in the mirror. "Listen to me; get out of that cell," he says. "Crawford would transfer you if you asked. He knows Lecter and Andrews are going to come to blows eventually."

"Then what?" Will asks. "It'll be open season on my ass. I'm ex law enforcement. And my face is making me the wrong kind of friends. My choices are Hannibal, getting raped by half the prison and probably killed, or spending the rest of my sentence in solitary. At least with Hannibal I know what I'm getting."

Price looks like he's tasted something sour. "There's always protective custody," he says weakly. They both know solitary isn't an option. "There's got to be another option," Price says. "Zee and I are worried about you. Don't let him manipulate you into helping him. He's not your friend, there's something really wrong with him, Will. "

"You mean the cannibalism isn't normal?" Will asks sarcastically. "Look, I need a favour, can you help me or not? I'll keep your name out of it."

Price visibly gives up. "What do you need?"

Will brings Price back to his cell, figuring Hannibal can handle himself. He has an unofficially proven history of inmate on inmate violence and since he’s not gang affiliated, interested in the drug trade, or making waves one way or the other, the others leave him alone. The Woods are watching him, circling closer, but they're not going to strike. Not yet.

Price is out of there and back to his own cell a scant two minutes before Hannibal comes back in time for lockdown. Will's cleaning out the sink, wiping down the taps, the ledge where they keep their toothbrushes, and the shitty mirror when he hears Hannibal. He doesn't turn around as the door closes, locks sliding into place, waiting for Hannibal to speak.

"I don't recall giving you permission to cut your hair," Hannibal says finally, a good few seconds after the silence has become uncomfortable.

Will rubs a hand over his newly shaved head and watches in the mirror as Hannibal comes up behind him. "Yeah, well, I didn't want anyone grabbing it in a fight."

"Who helped you?" Hannibal asks and Will grins humourlessly at his reflection.

"You know I won't tell you," he says as Hannibal adds, "Zeller or Price?"

Will shakes his head. "Leave them alone, Hannibal. It's done."

Hannibal moves fast as a snake when he wants to and it's starting to worry Will how easily Hannibal is able to force submission with chokeholds. He gets Will into a sleeper hold and Will fights back, but his elbow is blocked by his own body and he can't tuck his chin enough to bite Hannibal. He kicks uselessly but already the world is going dark at the edges.

Will comes to with his upper body bound up in sheets like a straightjacket and his ankles tied to the bed with their clothing. There's something stuffed in his mouth, and he suspects they're his underwear. Clean, at least, since he's still wearing the ones he'd started the day in. Despite Hannibal's reassurances, there's some frightened part of Will that still expects Hannibal to rape him. But he's still clothed. Hannibal is still clothed.

He's frightened anew because it was his job to imagine horrors and he can't help but imagine what Hannibal might to do him if sexual assault is off the table.

"You've only been out for half a minute," Hannibal says, calmly. "Normally I would ask you to explain to me why you're being punished, but I suspect you would simply resort to cursing at me and I have no wish to do you serious damage."

Will struggles helplessly. He can't even sit up, not with the way the sheets are wrapped around his torso.

"As per our agreement, you are to ask my permission before taking action. You neglected to mention your desire for a haircut, so now you are being punished. I had considered hurting Price or Zeller; both if you wouldn't tell me which one helped you." He pauses to let that sink in.

Will goes still. He tries to beg Hannibal not to, but his voice is muffled into incomprehension.

Hannibal puts a comforting hand on Will's shoulder. "I can see you would be properly chastised to know you had caused them harm, but something less permanent will suffice. It is just hair, after all, it will grow back."

Insanely, Will feels grateful. Stockholm Syndrome, battered person syndrome; he can't think straight with Hannibal gently running his hand over Will's head.

Hannibal shifts so he's sitting on Will's legs, pinning his knees down. Will can't see what he's doing but he can take a pretty good guess when Hannibal holds one foot in his hand and then there's a sharp sting on the sole of his foot.

"This should prove sufficiently uncomfortable for the next little while to remind you that every step, every action you take, is because I have allowed it."

By the time Hannibal is finished the soles of both Will's feet are lacerated in half a dozen places but it doesn't hurt like Will thought it would. Mostly he just feels moisture running down his feet, dripping on the floor. They'll hurt later, he has no doubt about that.

"Now," Hannibal says. He has a fucking scalpel. Will watches as he washes Will's blood off it and secrets it in his jumpsuit. "I am going to let you up. I recommend that you thank me and clean up the mess you're making of the floor."

He hooks the underwear out of Will's mouth and tosses them in the sink. Will works his jaw as Hannibal unties him. His mouth is dry now, but he croaks out, "Thank you," because Hannibal has a fucking scalpel and Will is trapped in a room with him. How the fuck he got his hands on a weapon like that, Will doesn't even want to know. He handles it like he knows exactly what he's doing. It occurs to Will then, exactly how crazy Hannibal is, how many cell mates he's killed. Exactly what he is.

He gets off the bed and puts his bloody feet on the floor. They hurt as the cuts widen from the weight of his body so he gets down on his knees and accepts the wet towel Hannibal hands him. Will starts mechanically wiping up the blood. His throat hurts. His head aches. For every drop of blood he mops up, more is pouring from his feet. He sees them both from a distance, like a crime scene.

It crystallizes for him in that moment. Hannibal is a sadist, an M.D., a psychologist, a murderer, a cannibal.

"They weren't surgical trophies," Will says, letting the towel slip from his hands. He gets to his feet again, adrenaline coursing through him. His heart feels like it's trying to crawl up out of his throat. "We all thought the Chesapeake Ripper was taking surgical trophies, but we were wrong."

Hannibal watches him with some measure of surprise. It's hard to tell, but he looks almost impressed.

"It was you," Will says. "You're the Ripper. All the organs you took, the flesh...the meat. You were eating them."

Hannibal smiles at him, and it's more frightening than Will thought it would be. "Remarkable boy," Hannibal says.

Will flinches back when Hannibal reaches for him, but there's nowhere to go so Will lashes out. He punches Hannibal in the mouth. They stagger apart, but that's not very far in the confines of the cell.

"Oh my God," Will says. He just punched the Chesapeake Ripper.

And never mind that, he's blown the Ripper. Fuck, he's let the Chesapeake Ripper blow him.

Hannibal wipes the back of his wrist over his mouth. He's bleeding now as well. "I do admire your courage," he says.

"Fuck your admiration," Will says, panting like an animal.

He tries to fight back when Hannibal comes at him again, but he's not as strong. Will goes down swinging, but he goes down, and soon enough Hannibal has him on his stomach on the floor, arm wrenched up behind his back high enough that he thinks his shoulder might pop out of joint.

Will doesn't want to die like this.

But instead of the bite of Hannibal's stolen scalpel, he lets go. Will rolls onto his back and stares up at Hannibal.

"Get up," Hannibal says at last, holding out a hand. "Let me look at your feet. You were supposed to stay off them until tomorrow."

Will lets Hannibal pull him up, settle him down on the bunk so Hannibal can sit on the desk chair with Will's feet in his lap. The Chesapeake Ripper is frowning at his feet, muttering to himself in French about stubborn Americans. Will feels like he's stepped out of reality into some strange mirror world, but he's felt a lot like that since he first was arrested. Since before that, when his brain started to boil in his head.

"You are though," Will says, flinching when Hannibal starts cleaning the cuts he inflicted in the first place.

Hannibal cocks an eyebrow. "I'm not going to hurt you, Will," he says, thumbs sliding over the delicate skin of Will's ankles. “N'es-tu plus mon esclave, ne suis-je plus ton maître?”

There's blood all over the floor, but Hannibal simply wraps Will's feet in two layers of socks and cleans the mess himself.

"You're not going to hurt me?" Will repeats, incredulous.

"I will sleep on your bunk tonight," Hannibal says. "I want you off your feet until absolutely necessary." He climbs onto the top bunk and Will can hear him settling himself. He can picture Hannibal lying there with his eyes closed, somewhere far away in his mind, hands folded over his stomach.

He puts his head in his hands, scrubbing his palms over his freshly shaven head. He has no proof of who Hannibal is. He could shout it from the highest mountain and it wouldn't matter. If they didn't discover what Hannibal was when they arrested him, they're not going to find anything now. He's not a threat, Will realizes. There's nothing he can do to hurt Hannibal, so there's no need for Hannibal to hurt him.

"Better to beg forgiveness than ask permission," Will says, lying back on Hannibal's bunk.

There's a long silence and then Hannibal says, "Not from me."

"I won't tell anyone," Will says quietly. "What does it matter now?" It sounds like an apology, which is good, since he'll be damned before he actually says those words.

Another long silence. "You look younger with no hair," Hannibal says. "You look breakable. That's why I would have said no."

Will sighs, staring at the bunk above him. If he's not mistaken that's Hannibal's version of an apology as well. "We're so fucked," he says. His voice is smaller than he'd like it to be.

Hannibal climbs down and sits next to Will. He reaches under the mattress and pulls out a shiv fashioned out of sharpened plastic with a duct-tape handle and presses it into Will's hand. "You do what you have to," he says. "They will not hesitate to murder you, please do not hesitate to defend yourself."

He doesn't flinch when Will reaches up and catches hold of the collar of his jumpsuit, pulling him down. Will could cut his throat and rid the world of the Ripper forever. But Hannibal is never getting out of prison, and he's all Will's got, so Will kisses him instead.

Hannibal jerks back, startled. "If this is some misguided attempt to-"

"To what?" Will says. "To appeal to your better nature?" He tucks the shiv back under the mattress so he can hold onto Hannibal with both hands. "Don't be obtuse, I know what you are, I know who you are. I've spent years profiling you."

He can see Hannibal's pupils dilate. Narcissistic prick.

"One day I'll ask you to fuck me," he says, watching carefully. Hannibal's hands grip his thighs tight enough that Will suspects he'll have bruises later. "Not today."

"Knowing what I am?" Hannibal says. His breathing is steady, his pulse is not.

"Knowing what you are." Will kisses Hannibal again. His feet hurt, his shoulder hurts. Will thinks about the myths where knowing something's name gives you power over it. "Hannibal the cannibal," Will says, undoing his jumpsuit. He shifts his grip to Hannibal's hair and gives a suggestive push. "I won't make a bad joke of it if you blow me."

Hannibal's smile shows his teeth but Will doesn't flinch this time. "Say please," Hannibal says.

Will shakes his head. "I'll trade you for the truth." It's very possible Hannibal will walk away, but Will doesn't think so. He tugs a little at Hannibal's hair. "And just think, I know, and I'll let you put it in your mouth anyway."

Hannibal tugs Will's shorts down. Will isn't hard but Hannibal delicately licks the head of his cock and Will can feel his dick start to fill out.

"You're the Chesapeake Ripper but you've killed more than that." Hannibal's hand is warm and callused around him, cradling his cock as he mouths down the length. Will tips his head back and stares at the underside of his bunk. "The FBI just doesn't know about those ones, you don't display them. At least, not like that. Christ, stop fucking around and suck me."

Hannibal's teeth scrape down his cock before he wraps his lips around it and does what Will wants. Quid pro quo Will gives Hannibal what he wants.

"You cook, don't you? Well. Really well. You feed your victims to the people who think you are friends. It's not the cannibalism that gets you off, it's the power. You're meticulous on the edge of OCD because you have to control everything, because once control was taken from you and it nearly destroyed you."

Hannibal presses a finger into him and Will chokes back a moan.

"But you're lonely, you've been lonely all your life. No one would want -" Will has to stop when Hannibal forces another finger into him; too much, too soon.

"If they knew," Will says, breathing hard and watching his cock slip in and out of Hannibal's mouth. "But I know. You see them as pigs, as meat. You did it to make something beautiful out of something unworthy."

He plants one foot on the mattress so he can thrust into Hannibal's mouth and feels the blood soaking through the socks. Hannibal lifts Will's leg and rests it on his shoulder. The leverage isn't as good, but it also pushes Hannibal's back down so Will's not about to complain. The sound of Hannibal sucking him off is loud, and wet, and obscene.

"You've never met anyone who was smarter than you, who could outwit you." Will rolls his hips up, pushes Hannibal down and comes. He can't stop the small pained noise he makes

when Hannibal keeps sucking even though he's oversensitive. Point made, Hannibal lets him go and sits up. His hair is a mess and his mouth is red and used. It's a good look on him, Will thinks.

"I can," Will says. He hitches up his shorts and jumpsuit and smiles faintly. "Well, goodnight."

Chapter End Notes

They're reading the Count of Monte Cristo still, and the section they quote is this:
"Why demand permission ere you enter? Are you no longer my master, or have I ceased to be your slave?"
Monte Cristo returned her smile. "Haidee," said he, "you well know."
"Why do you address me so coldly—so distantly?"

Any conjugations were mine, and since I don't speak French, are likely to be wrong.

Chapter 6

For a long moment Hannibal just stares at him. Then he pushes Will's leg back, bending him in half and smacks him on the upper thigh, hard enough to seriously hurt. Will yelps and tries to scoot away but it's a losing battle.

"I will put you over my knee," Hannibal says and Will can't tell if it's humour or violence in his voice. "Don't think I won't."

He climbs up over Will, knees pressing into Will's underarms, thighs against his ribcage. He's a dark shadow, violent and hurtful, and he's never flinched from what Will can do. He's quicksand, and solid ground.

Months ago, in a different life, Will's mind burned and burned and eventually reality and delusion slid together into a nightmare he wasn't able to wake up from. Until he finally emerged, cuffed to a hospital bed, flames quenched, and was told about the terrible thing he'd done. It's one thing to shoot a murderer in the heat of pursuit, but when the killers in your head spill out like blood and your destruction of another human makes their cruelties look like art…that's another thing altogether.

Hannibal knows the killers in his head, he is one of them. Jack Crawford was right, Hannibal is the devil, but Will earned his spot in Hell all on his own.

"Yeah," Will says. He puts his hands on Hannibal's thighs, slides them up to his waist. "Yes. Please."

Hannibal tucks a pillow under Will's head before he gets his cock out. Will doesn't have to do much, just tips his head back to open his throat and lets Hannibal fuck his mouth. His hands cradle Will's head, fingers curved around the deceptively fragile skin and bone that contains Will's damaged mind. His thumbs press against the rough stubble where Will's hair was, the rest of his fingers tracing the line where the plates of the skull fuse together, as though he might try to crack Will open.

Afterwards, Hannibal says, apropos of nothing, "Your facility with language is impressive. You've learned more French than I had hoped."

Will thinks about getting up and brushing his teeth but he doesn't want to stand up. "Thanks," he says, but it sounds like a question.

Hannibal arranges Will on his side and lies down, pressed against his back. "For forty years there was a ban on any books being printed in the Lithuanian language. That's the Russians for you. When the ban was finally lifted Vincas Krėvė-Mickevičius published a collection of folklore and fairy tales; Dainavos šalies senų žmonių padavimai. I learned English by reading similar books. Children's stories, I suppose, but culturally important. Luckily for you, I have an excellent memory."

Will hums his agreement, but he's exhausted and he isn't really listening. He falls asleep listening to Hannibal recite Lithuanian folk tales and dreams of Baba Yaga's house up on its chicken legs, where inside Hannibal is standing at the stove; he smiles at Will with his teeth stained red with blood.

The next morning Will can barely walk. The lacerations in his feet don't hurt at all when he's sitting, but the second he puts any weight on them they're agony. Hannibal watches him limp to breakfast with poorly concealed delight and arousal.

Hannibal drinks his terrible coffee and doesn't complain about the food. He watches Will eat with an intensity that should feel intrusive, but Will figures it's a bit late to start feeling violated. It's easy to see now, the hunger that occupies the space where his humanity should be.

Will licks his spoon and meets Hannibal's eyes. "I'm not sure when I started hallucinating," he says. "That was part of the problem, nothing seemed right so nothing seemed out of place."

Hannibal props his chin on his hand, elbow on the table. "You have always seen things a little differently."

"Yeah," Will says. "In and out of the heads of murderers. The way I see the crimes…I become them, in the abstract. Like an actor putting on a performance. I can feel what they feel, I see what they see. But I also know the script. When I got sick I started getting lost. Confused. I started sleepwalking. Then I was losing time. I would be at a crime scene, then in my home, hours later, in a different state, and have no idea what happened in between."

"You didn't tell anyone?"

Will shakes his head. "I thought I was losing my mind. I thought…I don't know. My brain was on fire. I wasn't thinking."

"You had excellent grounds for an insanity plea," Hannibal says. He looks different, but Will hasn't figured out why yet. He will.

"I knew what I was doing," Will says. "I remember doing it. Not at first, but it came back to me."

Hannibal sits back so he can drink his coffee. "I would think any decent lawyer could make a case for your illness being a contributing factor. You killed a murderer, did you not? Hardly a great loss to society."

It startles a laugh out of Will. "I don't think that's how it works, Hannibal," he says. "Well, you did gruesomely kill a man, but he was a terrible person so you're free to go."

"I certainly wouldn't be here," Hannibal says archly. His expression sharpens. "Ah, you felt guilty so you pled guilty and didn't defend yourself. Not a wise choice."

"No," Will says. "Probably not."

Hannibal is planning something, Will can see it in his eyes. It's less worrying to him than he feels it probably should be. All Hannibal says is, "Finish your breakfast," before reluctantly doing the same.

They go outside for rec where summer is creeping out of spring. It's a beautiful day. Warm, but not oppressive, the heat of the sun tempered by a breeze. The general mood of the prisoners is lighter, tempers soothed. The unusually aggressive basketball games seem a great deal more friendly. The gangs aren't eyeing each other as much as they usually do. Everyone seems content to enjoy the peace while it lasts.

Hannibal sits on the bleachers, face turned up to the sun. It's technically Latino territory, two gangs represented, but under a truce because racial politics come first. They - of all the inmates - have a fondness for Hannibal, or at least a tolerance, and don't seem to care if he sits near them. So, by default, they ignore Will perching next to Hannibal.

Price isn't as welcome. But he comes over anyway and pulls Will aside. Will limps just out of hearing range and then refuses to go any further.

"What'd he do to you?" Price asks.

"Nothing," Will says. "It's not that bad." He wishes they could have just had the talk on the bleachers. Standing isn't comfortable.

"Not that bad! Jesus, Graham, you can barely walk," Price exclaims.

Will keeps his eyes on the Woods, hanging out on the far side of the basketball court. He shrugs, hands stuffed in his pockets so he can touch the shiv. It reassures him. It's not a killing weapon, but it'll sure as hell deter any attackers. "It's my feet," Will says. "Not what you think."

That seems to stump Price. "Your…feet?"

"It's a long story."

Price makes a faux-shocked expression. "Well, my schedule is just so busy these days, we better not talk about it."

Will has to concede that point. "It's punishment, not abuse." He shakes his head. It sounds insane when he says it out loud. "It made sense when Hannibal explained it."

"Yeah, I bet it did," Price says darkly.

Will glances over at Hannibal who is watching him now. He looks younger, Will realizes. When he looks at Will like that, his sharp features are softened around the edges by the hints of a smile. Or perhaps not younger, just more human.

He sees himself as Hannibal sees him: he looks so delicate without hair, his posture half-flinch because of his feet but he's more solid than anyone knows. Hannibal knows. He knows that there's something dark and bloody inside of Will, that Will pled guilty not because of

what he did, but because of how he felt when he remembered doing it. The power of it, the pleasure. Hannibal sees him as something unique, something precious.

"Jesus fuck," Will mutters. Price is concerned, practically wringing his hands. "It's nothing," Will reassures him. "I just…I just realized something. Look, I'm fine, don't worry about me." He starts limping back to the bleachers.

Hannibal turns his face back towards the sun, eyes closed once more.

"Hey, Mictecacihuatl," an inmate called 'Duct Tape' by everyone else says. He slows as he walks, keeping pace with Will. "You need a hand?"

It takes Will a moment to realize Duct Tape is talking to him. "Uh," he says intelligently. "No?"

"Cool, man." Duct Tape carries on, unconcerned. He settles down on the bleachers with the others. Their Spanish is too fast and riddled with slang for Will to understand.

"Do I want to know?" Will asks Price, sitting back down. His feet feel like at least some of the cuts are bleeding again.

Price is reluctant to come too close. "They call Lecter Mictlantecuhtli so…You'll have to ask someone else what that means. Doesn't seem to bother Lecter though so it can't be that bad."

"The chief Mexicas god of the underworld," Hannibal says, without opening his eyes. "He has domain over all the types of death - heroic, non-heroic, normal - was often depicted as ready to tear the dead apart, and was worshiped by ritual cannibalism. The Spanish described him as Satan instead, in order to suppress the local traditions."

Will rolls his eyes because Hannibal can't see him. "Of course you'd like that," he says.

"As prison nicknames go, I could have done worse," Hannibal replies. "I believe Doctor Death has been bandied about. Which is ludicrous, I was an exceptional surgeon."

Will already knows he's not going to like the answer, but he says anyway, "So what's Mict… uh…the other one?"

Hannibal opens his eyes and smirks at Will. "Mictlantecuhtli's wife."

Price makes a sound that's part snort, part cough, and part laugh. Will only sighs.

Chapter 7

Will works in the yard doing basic maintenance. Hannibal's been in too many inmate altercations to have the privilege of working, so Will's on his own for a few hours a day. When possible, Hannibal hangs out in the yard and keeps an eye on him. Partly, Will thinks, to hold up his end of their bargain, and partly because he enjoys watching Will doing manual labour.

Since every step feels like he's walking on glass, Will's good humour towards Hannibal evaporates into a low-grade hatred with a side of seething. He's busy cursing Hannibal's name, loading turf into a wheelbarrow in the shed when he's jumped.

There's six of them, swastikas on their necks and forearms, shaved heads and big hands. They corner Will, shoving him, grabbing at his jumpsuit, trying to pin him down. Will knows he shouldn't struggle. He knows if he fights them there's a good chance they'll kill him. But he fights anyway.

He gets in a few good shots, knuckles splitting against cheeks and mouths, but he's unsteady on his feet and he's dragged to the ground, jumpsuit tearing at the seams as they rip it off him.

They're going to rape him to death, or at least he'll wish he was dead by the end of it. He sees it with perfect clarity and he kicks and rages and bites at anything that comes close. There's blood under his nails and in his mouth.

He gets his hands on his shiv and slices one of the men open, cheek to chin, the blade scraping along bone. He stabs another in the eye before his wrist is broken and the weapon goes skittering across the floor, disappearing under the workbench.

There's a shadow in the doorway and then Hannibal is there. The light from the tiny little window catches on the blade of his scalpel. One man goes down with his carotid gushing blood. Another grabs Hannibal and Hannibal's stabbed in the thigh before he manages to break the man's neck. He kicks out the knee of another before he's tackled to the floor.

They can't keep both Will and Hannibal down, and Will bites the nearest arm and twists free. He used to be a cop. He puts one of the Woods in a submission hold and keeps him there while Hannibal claws his way out from under the other two. Hannibal's scalpel is in someone else's hand but Hannibal breaks the arm holding it right before the screws pile on top of everyone and everyone gets to feel the business end of a baton.

There's blood everywhere. The man who Will stabbed in the eye is screaming still, so he'll probably live. The blade wasn't very long. He realizes it's Andrews' cheek that he sliced open. The same one Hannibal tore up. Will spits blood at Andrews as they're dragged apart.

"You fucking try it again," Will snarls. "I'll cut you so badly they'll need dental records to ID you." He can only see out of one eye, the other swollen and sore. His arm is screaming pain but he fights against the bulls.

He sees Hannibal bleeding from the head, trying to get to his feet, a moment before Beverly Katz tazes him and he goes down hard. Will knows he needs to just lie down and let the guards cuff him, but he started fighting and now he can't stop. There are months and months of anger and fear in him. Someone clocks him on the head with a baton and he's out.

Will remembers getting dragged down the hallway, bloody feet leaving smears on the floor.

He remembers a nurse checking his pupils and asking him who the president is.

His voice is slurred and confused when he asks for Hannibal.

When his head clears, Will is in the med ward with a broken wrist already in a cast, a black eye, three shallow defensive wounds to his forearms, two teeth that are wobbling but still in, a missing fingernail, and a wrenched shoulder. His feet are bleeding again. A nurse is examining them with a confused frown on his face.

Crawford, standing over his bed, has the look of a man whose patience ran out a long time ago. “I think I can guess what happened. It's not exactly a job for the Feds is it? But what I want to know is: what happened to your feet?"

Will turns his head until he can see Hannibal, on the other side of bulletproof glass, talking to the doctor. He has a head wound that's bleeding profusely and a split lip, but he looks like he's arguing with the doctor so it can't be all that bad. Will can also see the man whose eye he took out. Still alive. Will's not sure how he feels about that.

"I was in a fight," Will says. "What do you think?"

The nurse says, "This didn't happen in the fight," as though Crawford might be stupid enough to believe such an obvious lie.

Crawford doesn't dignify it with a response. "You gotta tell me, Graham,” he says. “You don’t want to be mixed up in all this. I can move you into protective custody.” He gives the days-old bruises on Will's wrists a pointed look. "I guess you got those in the fight too? And the bite mark on your shoulder."

"It happened in the fight," Will says stubbornly.

"We can do a rape kit," Crawford says, but his tone says he already knows what the answer is going to be. "We can get him away from you."

"They jumped me," Will says. "I defended myself. Hannibal came to help me. He took a knife for me. Nicest thing anyone’s done in a long time.” He’s not sure, but he thinks Hannibal is critiquing the doctor’s stitch job.

“He took a knife to protect his reputation,” Crawford corrects.

Will shrugs the shoulder that doesn't hurt and tries to keep his feet still while they're being bandaged properly. "His reputation is that he doesn't - that he isn't capable of caring. What sort of psychopath cares?"

Crawford shakes his head, tired. "He always has his reasons."

On the other side of the glass Hannibal has the needle and is stitching his own leg. He catches Will looking and winks at him. Will turns back to Crawford. "I'm a...I was a profiler," he says. The revelation that he had in the yard while he was talking to Price comes to him again. For a moment he waffles between telling Crawford and keeping it to himself. "Hannibal Lecter, insofar as he can feel love, is in love with me."

Shockingly, this revelation does not make Crawford look any happier. "Wonderful," he says. "That won't end badly at all."

No one talks. No one ever talks. Two bodies are taken to the morgue. Three are kept overnight in medical - Andrews, the guy whose eye Will took out, and the guy whose knee Hannibal shattered. Will and Hannibal are deemed fit to return to their cells, much to Hannibal's displeasure.

"They should have you under observation," he complains, as they're locked into their cell. "You took a serious blow to the head." Hannibal sits heavily, wounded leg stretched out. "The butchers in medical ought to have their licenses taken away. Come here and let me see your eye."

Will sits next to him on the bunk. They've given him painkillers and he feels like he's floating. Hannibal's fingers are light over the bruise as he checks for any broken bones.

Will's head is heavy so he props it up on Hannibal's shoulder.

"You have a very solid skull," Hannibal says fondly, stroking his head.

"I stabbed a man in the eye," Will says. "With a shiv. In a prison fight."

Hannibal begins undressing Will. For a moment Will is surprised by his ability to undress someone who is barely helping at all, but then he figures Hannibal got practice on all the bodies he took apart.

"How many people have you killed?" Will asks.

Hannibal checks the bandages on Will's feet then runs a cloth under the tap. He starts wiping at the blood still smeared on his own face. "A great many," he says. He sounds oddly thoughtful.

Will nods and shifts obligingly when Hannibal drags the blankets out from under him so he can tuck them over Will. Will shuffles around so he can put his head on Hannibal's unwounded thigh. He can feel Hannibal's heart beating, hear the soft sounds of digestion. "When you hurt someone..." Will tries to corral his thoughts. "When you helped me. Do you feel it like I feel it? Does your heart rate go up at all? Crawford doesn't think you can, but I think you can."

"I can what?" Hannibal leans over and snags his pad of paper and a pencil. He starts scribbling away, pausing every now and again as though trying to remember something.

"Love," Will says.

Hannibal doesn't say anything for a long time and if he does speak later, Will is already asleep.

He feels like hell for the next few days, but he and Hannibal are in lockdown anyway, so it's not like he has to do anything more than lie in bed and feel sorry for himself. Hannibal asks once if he remembers anything about the aftermath of the fight and Will can only shrug.

"I remember you winking at me," he says, spooning more applesauce into his mouth. He has no idea how the prison manages to fuck up applesauce. But they do. "And I remember telling Crawford my feet were cut up in the fight. Not much else."

Hannibal nods. "Hm," he says and doesn't mention it again.

They're out of lockdown a week later, and Hannibal plants Will with Zee and Price and makes a half-hour long phone call, much to the annoyance of the other inmates. Will keeps an eye on it, but no one bothers to start something.

When he's done, Hannibal takes Will back to the cell and hands him a folded piece of paper. "I took the liberty of calling a law firm for you. Your new lawyer will see you tomorrow and he will explain to you your appeal process."

"The judge threw the book at me. Nothing is going to get me out of here." Will unfolds the paper and see a long list of names. Hannibal's handwriting is awful. It's cramped and hard to read. Whatever it is that it's supposed to be, Will sees himself having to copy it out again. Fucking doctors. "What is it?" he asks. There's a second page tucked into the first, he realizes. Three sides filled with names.

"A comprehensive list of people I murdered over the past twenty years, including the prisoners here," Hannibal says calmly. It's a very long list. "The dates on which they were killed. I suggest they search my garbage disposal for human blood. It's hard to properly clean. I'm sure an industrious team would be able to find something. There is also a list of previous patients of mine who have undoubtedly racked up their own body count. With a little therapy it is a wonder what people can discover about themselves."

"Why are you giving me this?" Will folds the papers over and over until he can't see any of the names. His hands are shaking. It's one thing to know the man you're fucking is a serial killer. It's another thing to hold the list of his victims. So many people he butchered like animals. Will's stomach turns over and he wonders for a moment if he'll be sick.

Hannibal takes the paper from him and sets it down on the desk before he can accidentally shred it. Then he takes Will's face in his hands. "You're going to provide evidence against me in return for a reduced sentence. There is no reason why you should have to serve any longer than you already have."

"Are you trying to get rid of me?" Will asks.

"Absolutely," Hannibal says. "Your being here is a miscarriage of justice. I have also called a former colleague of mine who will assist you in forming an unconsciousness defence. Your previous lawyer was clearly bottom of his class. You will testify, I will be retried, found guilty and legally insane. I will be moved to the Baltimore State Hospital for the Criminally Insane. You will go free with time served."

Will can't turn his head so he closes his eyes. Hannibal's hands are firm on his face. He can feel Hannibal looking at him. He can feel Hannibal's regard. "You're not this altruistic."

Hannibal runs a proprietary hand over Will's back. "I am not." His thumb strokes the side of Will's jaw. "For you, perhaps."

Chapter 8

The lawyer Hannibal has procured is an orator, a realist, and clearly delighted that he's the one who gets to break the news that the Chesapeake Ripper has been found. He looks Will over and practically beams at him. "I want you to lose the beard and start growing your hair out, but that's a face I can sell."

Will ignores that. His previous lawyer had said something similar before Will told him he was pleading guilty. "How does this work?" Will asks. "Legally, I mean. If Hannibal's the one paying you, which I assume he is, since I'm not."

Brauer's eyebrows go up. "Is he now? Because my records have the money coming from some sort of 'project innocence' charity that was set up for you. All private donations. If he's paying for me to be here to help you testify against him than that could get complicated, legally speaking." His voice lilts in a way that suggests he's prompting Will.

Will shrugs and picks at his cast. "Maybe I was mistaken." He's going to give Hannibal an absolute earful when he gets back to the cell. Whatever game he's playing, Will doesn't like it. There's something off about the whole thing.

Brauer sits back in his chair, pleased. "Good man. So, let's talk about how this is going to work. I'm going to talk to the DA and we're going to cut a deal. You'll testify against Hannibal Lecter, which will require a written statement, and probably some court time if Lecter decides to play hardball and fight the charges. In return for your cooperation and in light of 'new' evidence about your mental state, you will be released. On parole if I can't sweet-talk the DA, but likely freed because I'm very good at what I do."

"He's going to plead guilty but insane," Will mutters.

Brauer makes a note in his file. "Well, that's not my problem," he says cheerfully. "Thank the good lord for that. You have the list?"

Will slides it across the table. He's reluctant to let it go and he's not sure why. He'd copied out the names so they were legible, and he'd recognised the Ripper victims, one or two other cases they'd never solved, but most of the kills he'd never even caught wind of. Brauer takes the list and scans it without any real interest in the names, just in the length.

"I'm kind of impressed," he says. "He had a full-time job, maintained a social calendar...All while sneaking about Maryland murdering half the state. I just can't figure out how he found the time." Brauer taps his pen against his teeth. "And you say he encouraged several of his other patients to commit homicide?"

Will stares out the window rather than looking at his visitor. "Yeah. Some good psychiatry, huh?"

"How's he been as a cellmate?" Brauer asks, jotting something else down. Will itches to take his notes and see what sort of bullshit this lawyer is going to come up with. "Your records say

you've sustained injuries?"

"Are you asking if he beats me, or if he fucks me?" Will says. Brauer doesn't flinch. "I was attacked by the Aryan Brotherhood," he says stubbornly.

"Uh-huh," Brauer says. "Your records also state that one beating early in your sentence, some bruises, a bite mark, and lacerations to your feet were not sustained in that fight, but that you refused to comment on them. Also you refused a rape kit?"

Will forces himself to make eye contact. "For the very last time, Hannibal Lecter is a murderer, he's a cannibal, and he's a son of a bitch. I'm happy to talk about that. He didn't rape me, I don't want to talk about that. Move on."

"The court's going to ask you," Brauer warns. "You don't seem scared of him, and off the record he's paying for me to be here, so I need you to tell me what's actually going on or this is going to blow up in our faces the second anyone asks you a difficult question. You're a profiler, right? Well, when you testify they're going to want to hear your expert opinion. So what's your expert opinion."

Will rubs his hand over the bristles of his hair. "He's a narcissist with a god complex. He's never getting out of prison, so taking credit for all his murders allows him to have his time in the spotlight and continue to control the legal system and his victims. He already gets significant amounts of mail, seeking his opinion, marriage proposals...If he's a mass murderer the media will love him. Hannibal is also a hedonist and this place is awful. He's holding back names, I can tell. He'll trade those names and the location of any remains for nicer conditions. Especially since he's angling to be moved to a mental institution. Less neo-Nazis trying to kill him, more time for him to, I don't know, weave baskets and traumatize other patients."

Brauer hides a smile behind his fist and a cough. "Fair enough. Maybe skip that last part. Tell me, are you in a sexual relationship with Hannibal Lecter?"

"I already told you-"

"Don't kid a kidder, Graham," Brauer says. "You know what I'm asking."

Will stares sullenly out the window again. "What do you want me to say?"

Brauer's considering the angles. Will can practically hear the gears turning in his head. Finally Brauer says, "He's giving you all his murders. Most of his murders. Will he really care if the court thinks he forced you?"

"Maybe." Will sighs. "He's monstrously proud of what he is. I don't imagine he'd like everyone thinking he's a rapist."

"Talk to him," Brauer says. "It might not come up, but we need to be ready for it."

Will doesn't like to say that he sulks all the way back to the cell, but it's the closest thing he can think of to describe how he feels. Hannibal isn't in the cell and that sours his mood

further. His wrist aches and he can feel his teeth grinding.

He leaves the cell and knows that whatever is boiling up in him is bad news. The fight with the Aryans woke up his anger and something about Brauer has brought back that scream he's been holding in. He's looking for a fight and that's probably the stupidest thing he's done so far, including everything that's happened with Hannibal.

Andrews is back in gen pop with everyone else. His face is still bandaged. The muscle and tissue is so damaged that he'd need plastic surgery to repair the mess. Will starts towards him, not sure if he's planning on taking a swing or not when Hannibal appears out of nowhere and catches Will by the arm.

"Whatever you're thinking, don't," Hannibal says.

Will tries to shake him off, furious but Hannibal's grip is like a vice.

"There a problem, gentlemen?" he hears Katz call out and Hannibal lets go.

"No problem," Hannibal says. He still has a burn on his shoulder from where she tazed him during the fight. She, of all the COs trusts him about as far as she can throw him and probably won't hesitate to taze him again if he provokes her. He lowers his voice and says to Will, "If you start any fights I cannot promise I will be able to protect you, and more importantly, you will not be paroled."

Will heads for the gym because if he doesn't hit something he's going to start screaming just to let the pressure out. Hannibal follows at a respectable distance. He waits, sitting casually on the floor, knees bent, supporting his forearms, and watches Will beat the punching bag until his hands hurt, the sweat has soaked his shirt and is dripping from his eyelashes, and Will realizes he's gasping for air.

"You have terrible form," Hannibal remarks. "You hold your shoulders so tightly."

"I was stabbed," Will says through his teeth.

Hannibal gets up and moves behind him. Will's shoulders don't relax. If anything they tighten. Then Hannibal's hands are pushing down, warm and steady. His thumbs dig into the knots of Will's muscles and it hurts, it hurts until it doesn't and Will thinks he might actually whimper when the tension starts to let up. Hannibal slides his thumbs up the back of Will's neck.

"I find it odd that you are less angry with me when I hurt you than when I try to help you."

Will rests his sweaty forehead against the punching bag. "What aren't you telling me? Brauer wants me to testify that you're...Jesus, Hannibal. I don't know what you want."

"That must be strange for you," Hannibal says, placidly. Will wants to shake him until his teeth rattle. "We should go back to the cell, it's almost time for count."

Will doesn't argue. There's no point. You can't argue with count.

It isn't until the door to their cell is locking behind them that he realizes he hasn't showered and he'll either have to take a whore's bath in the sink or Hannibal can just deal with him smelling the way he does. He watches as Hannibal moves all his papers up onto the shelf so the desk is clear. Then their toiletries. Then he's toeing off his shoes and stripping to the waist. Will has no idea what he's doing and says as much when Hannibal looks at him expectantly.

Instead of answering, Hannibal slaps him, hard enough to make him stagger.

The door to their cell is a thick grating. It's hard to see out. It's hard to see in. Will isn't sure what genius dreamed that up. It gives the inmates privacy, which is nice. But it also gives the inmates some privacy, which can be problematic.

Now though, it's going to work to Will's advantage.

He's been so many killers. Muscle memories that don't belong to him. Will comes in low, shoulder to Hannibal's solar plexus. Hannibal thuds back against the wall as Will rabbit punches him in the side. It's Will's left hand, which is weaker, and he's still exhausted from beating on the punching bag, but he's so angry he's choking on it. Hannibal's elbow comes down on his back, but Will is already dropping to the floor. He slams his cast against the wound in Hannibal's thigh which hurts him as much as it hurts Hannibal.

Hannibal gets him by the collar of his shirt and pulls him away. He's so fast. One moment he's holding Will in place, the next he's backhanding him.

Will shoves Hannibal's knee so he has to fall or risk dislocating it. Will is on him, forearm across Hannibal's throat, one knee jammed up against his ribs, the other on the knife wound. Hannibal doesn't bother to struggle, he just gets hold of Will's thumb and bends it back until Will's entire broken wrist is agony. Hannibal moves Will off him, Will cursing and hitting him ineffectually.

Insanely, Hannibal just lets go. Will tackles him back down. They both crash into the bunk, Will slamming his ribs into the metal, Hannibal narrowly missing cracking his head open. Hannibal drags Will further up onto the mattress with sheer brute strength and forces Will's face against the mattress so he can't breathe. Just when Will thinks he's going to pass out, Hannibal lets go again and doesn't press his advantage.

Will rolls onto his back. "You're letting me win?" he asks incredulously.

Hannibal pushes his hair out of his eyes. If he's in any pain he's hiding it well. "You're angry," he says, like that explains anything.

Will sits up. Hannibal's stillness is a warning. He's ready to strike. "You slapped me," Will says.

"I would prefer you do this here and work it out of your system than trying to start something with Andrews."

Will head-butts him. Hannibal sits back, hard, and now Will's back on top. He sits on Hannibal's chest this time, gets his left hand around Hannibal's throat and actually puts serious pressure on his windpipe. "You condescending prick," Will says. "You think you're so far above this all but I can hurt you and if I can, so can anyone else."

"Are you worried about me?" Hannibal chokes out. His mouth is bleeding, his teeth stained red.

Will tightens his grip, completely cutting off Hannibal's air. Hannibal doesn't fight back. He lies there and lets Will strangle him. It would be so easy to crush his windpipe. Human bodies are so fragile. They break apart so easily, Will thinks, they break apart so beautifully.

"If you transfer out of here do you think that they can't hurt you somewhere else? They are going to pump you so full of chemicals you'll be lucky if you can remember your own name," Will snarls. "They're going to stick you in a padded cell and when you give them trouble they'll give you ECT and strap you to your bed."

Will wants to crack Hannibal's ribcage open and eat his heart. He wants to hurt him and watch him suffer. He wants to hide this fragile light somewhere where only he can see it, selfish and greedy. He wants to...

Will lets go, and as Hannibal coughs and breathes, Will kisses him. Hannibal's hands are large and warm on his thighs, sliding back to cup his ass. He puts his weight on Hannibal's chest and kisses him, hard, tasting the blood in his mouth, until Hannibal turns his head to the side so he can get some air.

Suddenly the thoughts in his head don't fit anymore, sitting at painful angles. They're not his. They're reflections of Hannibal's.

"You're a mess," Will says, the anger draining out of him. "Do you know that? I see inside your head and you're such a mess. They could give you the death penalty, Hannibal. Did you even think about that?"

"They won't," Hannibal says calmly. His heart-rate is already slowing, Will can feel it. His own is racing. He's not angry, but he's still a live wire of tension and pent up energy. He kisses Hannibal again, pressing hard against his mouth until Hannibal is short of breath again and his mouth is rubbed pink from Will's beard.

"You don't know that," Will says, making decisions too fast to wonder if he's doing the right thing or not. "You don't know half as much as you think you do. It's not your fault. It's one of the downsides to being completely insane and having a god complex the size of Jupiter." He strips off his own shirt. "Get your jumpsuit off," he says and crawls down the bunk to help when Hannibal doesn't move fast enough for his taste. The stitches in Hannibal's thigh are seeping blood and he goes to lick it up but Hannibal pushes him away.

"The human mouth is far from sterile," Hannibal says. "I'd rather not get an infection, if it's all the same."

Will bites him, hard, in the meat of his thigh. Hannibal hisses through his teeth and his hands skate over the bristle of Will's shaved head, nothing to grab. Hannibal's heart-rate might stay steady and even when they fight, but he's not unaffected, he's hard as Will is.

"Brauer wants me to tell the courts you're fucking me," Will says. He holds Hannibal's hips down as best he can and slides his mouth down Hannibal's dick. Giving head isn't any easier the second time, but Will chokes himself on Hannibal's cock and is disproportionately proud of himself when Hannibal curses.

"Would you like me to?" Hannibal asks. Now Will can feel his pulse start to pick up.

Will takes his mouth off Hannibal's dick just enough to say, "No." A thin thread of saliva connecting his lip to Hannibal's skin trembles and breaks. "I want you to let me fuck you."

Chapter 9

Chapter Notes

This chapter has discussions of sexual abuse of a minor. Please read responsibly.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

A whole body flinch shocks through Hannibal. For a moment he is somewhere else. Clarity returns to his expression. Hannibal's fists flex in the sheets, he takes a breath, then he pushes himself up onto his elbows. "I'm afraid that's not on the table," he says, with perfect calm. "At this point, at least."

"Okay," Will says. Will isn't sure he wants to know what things make the Chesapeake Ripper wake up screaming in the night, and he isn't sure he wants to know what could make him flinch like that either. He strips off the rest of his clothing so they're on more equal footing and sits back so he's not pinning Hannibal down.

Hannibal sits up fully and roughly pulls Will to him, settling him with his knees on either side of Hannibal's hips, and kisses him. There are bruises blooming on his neck that are the shape of Will's hands. Will presses his mouth to them, to feel the blood hot under the surface of Hannibal's skin.

"Tell me, Will Graham," Hannibal says. He bends his knees so Will has something to lean against. "Would that make you feel like you had more control over your own life?"

"Not really," Will says. He rolls his hips, pushing his cock against Hannibal's and is grateful when Hannibal gets the hint and takes them both in his hand, a little dry, a little too tight. "Would fucking me make you feel like you have control?"

Hannibal rubs his thumb over the head of Will's cock and Will presses his face against Hannibal's neck to smother a moan. "I don't need to sodomize you to have control," Hannibal says. His fingernail scrapes delicately across Will's slit and Will doesn't need to see Hannibal's face to know he's delighted by the way it makes Will shudder and push helplessly against him.

"No," Will agrees. He lifts Hannibal's hand to his mouth and sucks two of his fingers. Hannibal presses down on his tongue, right at the back, and Will gags, clutches at Hannibal's shoulders with one hand and starts jerking them with the other.

Hannibal's breath comes harder. He pulls his wet fingers from Will's mouth, rests them against Will's bottom lip. "What then?"

Will licks the pads of his fingers. He can't meet Hannibal's eyes.

"Ask me," Hannibal says, but it's less of a demand and more of a request. His voice is rough and he puts his other hand over Will's stopping him from jerking them. "Ask me, Will."

Will kneels up and Hannibal rubs his fingers gently against Will's hole. "Do it," Will says, before he can change his mind. "I trust you not to hurt me." Will realizes he believes it, after he says it.

Hannibal's sigh is filled with satisfied longing. He is careful when he pushes his fingers into Will. It aches but it's not painful. Will shoves him onto his back and shamelessly rubs against him as Hannibal opens him up. His head hangs down between his shoulders and there's sweat starting to run down his spine. Hannibal's fingers are not small and Will's breath stutters out of him in a whine when Hannibal works a third into him.

Hannibal pulls Will down into a kiss. "Check under the mattress," he says and crooks his fingers as Will stretches out over him, bites his nipple.

Will's breath punches out of him. He manages to get a hand under the mattress and comes up with a sachet of medical grade lubricant. "Do you just spend all your time stealing things from the med ward?" he asks. "How do you even get in there?"

"Put it on me," Hannibal says.

"Seriously," Will says. He tears the sachet open with his teeth and squeezes the lube out onto Hannibal's cock. "I can't figure it out."

"When I leave you in the cell on the COs say-so, where do you think I go?"

Will's answer is lost in his groan when Hannibal pulls his fingers out and takes hold of Will's hips, tight enough to bruise. "They bring me in to tell them if it's an emergency or not when the doctor is at one of the other prisons he works in. I did an emergency appendectomy once." He sounds nostalgic. "I've learned a little sleight of hand in my spare time. It's kept me well supplied in surgical spirits."

"You steal surgical spirits to clean this cell, don't you. Half the inmates would be drinking it, and you're wiping down sinks." Will swallows convulsively when he feels Hannibal's cock press against him. He has a moment of intense panic and he grabs Hannibal's throat again.

Hannibal stays still. His pupils are blown wide and he is flushed with arousal. "It is your decision, Will."

Will tightens his grip so he can feel Hannibal struggle for every sip of air. He eases himself down until Hannibal is just inside him. It feels far different from Hannibal's fingers, and his legs tremble as though they might give out. Hannibal supports him, with his hands, and then with his mouth. He tempts Will forwards for a kiss so Will is kneeling with his weight on his hands, not on his thighs.

"There you go," Hannibal says, breathless, low and soft, like he's not even aware he's saying it. His fingers skate down the length of Will's back. "Respire, chéri," Hannibal says, as Will keeps choking him. "Prends ton temps."

It's disconcerting. Will had pictured this moment a hundred times and in none of those imaginings had Hannibal been considerate. He hasn't been considerate until now, he's been pushy and utterly unapologetic about violating all of Will's boundaries.

Will bites Hannibal's lip and forces himself down. Any noise Hannibal made is strangled into silence by Will's hands around his neck. "Tais-toi et baise-moi," he says.

Hannibal grins at him, feral and sharp. He doesn't ask for Will to let go, or even to relax his grip a little. Just one moment Will is atop him, the next Hannibal is twisting like a cat and Will ends up face down on the mattress, Hannibal behind him. He takes Will by the hip and shoulder and fucks into him hard.

Will barely manages to put his hands over his mouth in time. He's never been especially loud during sex, but every time Hannibal stuffs him full of cock he can hear himself moaning.

"It's good," he says. "It's good, I like it, Christ, Hannibal."

Hannibal comes down over him, chest pressed against his back. "Tell me," he says. His weight rests heavy on Will as he takes hold of Will's cock in one hand, stroking him out of time with his thrusts. Will can't decide which he wants to push into.

"I've never," Will says in a harsh whisper. "I didn't think. Oh God, there." He has to stop talking, too busy trying not to get any louder.

"You didn't think you would like it?" Hannibal asks. "When we understand each other so well, how could we stumble here? I want you to come for me like this." He takes his hand off Will's dick. "Do you think you can?"

Will whines, high in his throat. "Damn it," he says. "Please touch me. Hannibal, please." Hannibal sits back on his heels, pulling Will with him so Will is sitting in his lap. Hannibal suddenly feels like he's so much deeper than before. Will reaches back and grabs Hannibal's hair.

"Alright, chéri," Hannibal says. He puts his hand back on Will's cock, jerking him with tight, fast strokes. Will squirms helplessly on his dick, pressing back to feel Hannibal solid and immovable behind him. His orgasm rushes up out of him and he comes, body tightening in waves so Hannibal feels huge inside. Hannibal strokes him through it before pushing him back down and fucking him, hard and fast.

Will considers doing something useful to help him get off, but he feels wrung out and boneless. His whole body shaking with released tension. It doesn't take long before Hannibal pulls out and comes over his back. Will grumbles out a complaint, but then Hannibal is licking him clean, stroking his hands over Will's arms and back until the shaking has subsided.

" Ça va?" Hannibal says.

"Oui, ça va," Will replies. He rolls onto his side, watching lazily as Hannibal wets his shirt and wipes himself off. He lets Hannibal wash him a little before batting his hand away. "Just

lie down already," he says. "You're murdering the afterglow."

Hannibal smirks at him, but lies down on the bunk.

They manage to spend a good five minutes lying quietly without antagonizing one another before Will sighs. "Am I going to have to intuit what happened, or will you tell me?" He wants to say 'I don't want to trigger you,' but he's not sure Hannibal would understand, and if he did, he knows Hannibal wouldn't appreciate the sentiment.

Hannibal wets his lips, staring up at the bunk above them. "What do you think?" he says, but it's almost sarcastic.

It seems impossible to him that anyone could hurt Hannibal. Oh, they could hurt his body, but not enough to hurt the creature inside. Apparently that wasn't true. "How old were you?"

"Eleven," Hannibal says, without hesitation. "I was thirteen when it stopped. It was a small cruelty in a world of cruelties. Many worse things have happened, Will. It does not concern me."

"He-"

"They," Hannibal corrects, and it is Will's turn to flinch. "I spent three years in an orphanage. I did not speak a single word those three years, nor make any sound voluntarily. I think that frustrated many people who wished me to be grateful, or frightened. Some delighted in forcing sounds from me."

Will cards his fingers through the hair on Hannibal's chest. "Did you kill them?"

Hannibal closes his eyes. "I did," he says. "Eventually."

Their names are probably not on the list Will has. Abusers, molesters, rapists. Will isn't about to mourn them. He tries to picture Hannibal as a child, teetering awkwardly on the edge of puberty. Tries to picture anyone making Hannibal do something he didn't want to do. "I'm sorry."

"Don't be trite," Hannibal says, irritation in his voice.

"God forbid," Will says and Hannibal tweaks his ear. Will bites him. Not hard, just to show his teeth.

Chapter End Notes

I'm hoping Hannibal says:
Breathe, darling.
Take your time.

Will says: Shut up and fuck me.

Chapter 10

Hannibal looks like eight kinds of hell the next morning and Will finds that he likes it. He watches Hannibal examine his throat in the shitty mirror over the sink and frown at his reflection as though that will change it. The bruises on his throat darkened over night and Will can't help but feel a little smug. They stretch almost all the way around his neck. He gets up and puts his arms around Hannibal, resting his chin on Hannibal's shoulder.

"This changes things," Hannibal says finally. "There is no hiding these and people will make their own assumptions. There will be fights now."

Will finds that he is spectacularly unconcerned. "So we stick together, and we fight if we have to," he says. He's tempted to put his hands on Hannibal's cock and get him hard, but the cell doors will be opening soon and that could get awkward.

Hannibal turns around. "The idea is to get you out of here," he says. "Not earn you a life sentence."

"I'm the key witness in the case against the Chesapeake Ripper," Will says. "No one gives a fuck if I get into prison fights."

Hannibal doesn't even reprimand him for swearing. He just sighs and gets dressed. Will isn't sure he likes this development. Hannibal looks tired and Will wonders how hard-earned his reputation here was. How many fights, how many trips to the hole after fights, how many carefully planted rumours before people left him alone. And Will has done away with all that.

It occurs to him, a little late, that if he's not Hannibal's bitch then they're fags. Not exactly a step up.

Will feels crazy, but not weighted down by delusions, and fever, and death. He feels manic and dangerous. He wants to go to the gym and fight Hannibal on the mats; knock-down, drag-out, no punches pulled. He wants to let Hannibal drag him down. He wants to do terrible things to Hannibal. With Hannibal. "You're the Chesapeake Ripper," Will says. "And I'm the Chesapeake Ripper, and the Westbridge Strangler, the Colombia Co-ed killer, and the Dollmaker, and a hundred more. *Fuck them*. Fuck all of them."

Hannibal gives him a wry look. "I suppose I shouldn't be surprised and I hope you will not be offended when I say that I have created a monster."

Will gestures at their surroundings. "Don't take all the credit." He presses a kiss to the corner of Hannibal's mouth and pulls his jumpsuit on before the cell doors unlock and swing open.

They're on their way to the mess when Crawford pulls him aside. Hannibal is moved on with the others and Will tries not to watch him go. He's pretty sure he fails when Crawford snaps, "Am I boring you, Graham?"

"Sorry," Will says.

Crawford glances in the direction of the line of prisoners then turns the full force of his glare on Will. "Whatever it is you're doing with Hannibal Lecter, it stops now."

Will stares at the air just to the left of Crawford. "Doing what?" he asks. He's not trying to be antagonistic, but he sounds sarcastic anyway.

Crawford scowls at him. "Hannibal looks like he was dragged backwards through a hedge and you're awfully light in the loafers. Especially since you're testifying against him."

Will's jaw ticks. "We're not hurting each other," he says.

"I didn't say you were," Crawford says. "I said I want you to stop what you're doing."

Will meets his eyes. "What are we doing?" he asks.

"Don't push me Graham," Crawford says. "I'll put one of you in another cell."

"You can't put anyone else in with Hannibal," Will points out. "I'm the first cellie he hasn't got rid of. He'll flat-out murder anyone else."

"So we'll put him in solitary and see how he likes it."

Will shrugs. "His lawyers will bury you. You know that. Cruel and unusual punishment based on unsubstantiated rumours of misdeeds, or something."

It's Crawford's turn to grind his teeth. Will cuts him off before he can say anything.

"He likes me, boss," Will says. "I can manage him. He's helping me get out of prison because he likes me. Don't fuck with that, sir. He'll start disturbing the peace. Let me manage him."

"Like you managed the Aryans?" Crawford says.

"They started that fight," Will says. "He was protecting me."

"He killed two people."

"Allegedly," Will says.

Crawford gets up in his face. He's a big man and Will feels very small next to him. "The next one of you puts a toe out of line I will bury so deep not even the social justice campaigners will be able to find you. Do I make myself clear?"

"Yessir," Will says. The guards escort him onwards.

Breakfast is mostly uneventful. They sit with Hart, Mallori, Zee, and Price. Zee stares openly. "You fucking guys," he says. "Jesus, Lecter, they're going to eat you alive."

Zee gulps when Hannibal raises his eyebrows.

"I mean..."

Price cuts Zee off before he can dig himself any deeper. "You know what he means. Have either of you thought about what you're doing?"

"I don't recall soliciting your opinion," Hannibal says.

"Well, you're going to get it anyway," Price replies, emboldened, "because I know what you're in for and it's far worse than anything you're imagining."

Will is watching Hannibal's hands so he sees it when Hannibal palms Price's knife. They'll search Price but they won't find anything. He'll get away with stealing cutlery and no one will be punished. It's smart. "I'm not afraid to die," Hannibal says. "Knowing my life might end at any moment is a comfort to me. We live to our fullest in extremis, balanced on a knife's edge."

"Don't be an idiot," Mallori says. "If not for your sake, than for Will's."

"I didn't give myself these bruises. Will does what he likes." He takes a sip of his disgusting coffee and says, "Will, finish your eggs. I don't care if you smother them in ketchup, just eat them."

Will tries not to laugh. His knee knocks into Hannibal's under the table as he eats his eggs.

"You guys," Zee says, stricken. "You fucking guys, are you kidding me?"

Despite everyone's dire predictions, the morning passes uneventfully. Will can see the gears creaking to life in the minds of the other inmates, slowly starting to turn. It's not a speedy process. He's not worried when he's taken to the interview room so he can meet with the woman who's crafting his defense. It's all a bit surreal. Lawyers and shrinks, it's like his trial all over again, but this time he's awake for it.

Doctor Alana Bloom is a beautiful woman. Will probably should have expected that. He is very aware that he looks like a mess. She has a sheaf of papers in front of her, and a wary expression on her face. She's been crying, he can tell.

"So you and Hannibal worked together?" Will says awkwardly.

"He mentored me at Johns Hopkins," Alana says.

Will stares at the rim of his glasses. "You, uh, he said you were lovers?" Hannibal hadn't said any such thing, but Will wasn't a profiler for nothing. She doesn't say anything either. "I'm sorry. About...he shouldn't have asked you. But. Thank you, for your help."

"Is it true?" she asks. "Did he really kill those people?"

Will shrugs, shoulders twitching up and not coming back down. He doesn't ask how she knows; if Hannibal spoke to her already. Brauer maybe. "He ate a guy's tongue the first week I was here. Ripped it out of his mouth with his teeth and swallowed it."

Alana puts a hand over her mouth and closes her eyes. Will looks anywhere but at her, wishing he could let her grieve in private. But she puts her hand back down on the table and

composes herself so quickly. She has steel in her, and Will can see why Hannibal likes her.

"You were a profiler for the FBI?" she says. "A teacher, primarily, but you consulted on a few cases."

Will remembers trudging through the humidity of the De Soto National Forest trying to wear the skin of a man who was torturing teenage girls before he killed them and dumped their bodies like so much trash. He remembers staring at crime scenes - ironically enough - left by the Chesapeake Ripper. Pictures, and slide shows, and bodies on tables. "Yeah," he says.

"When did you discover you had encephalitis?" Alana asks. She probably has the entire file, but he supposes she has to get the story from him, in his own words.

"After I was incarcerated. The doctors don't think it did any irreversible damage, but who knows." Will picks at his cast. He barely remembers any of it. "By that point I was sleepwalking, losing time. I couldn't tell if I was awake or dreaming most of the time. Everything was surreal - I felt like I was fading."

Alana makes a note. Everyone takes notes on him now, Will thinks bitterly. He probably has a file somewhere in the warden's office with notes in it. "Can you remember the earliest moment you realised something was wrong?"

Will's laugh comes out of him involuntarily. "I thought I was losing my mind," he says. "But it seemed so normal. Only in hindsight...People have always been afraid of what I can do, Dr Bloom. They always said one day I would get myself too far into a killer to get back out again. I thought I would get better. I thought I could pull myself free. I can tell you if I was sleepwalking. I'd wake up on my roof, or in the road with the cops asking if I was drunk. But when reality started to slip? It made sense at the time."

"It says in your medical records that you had a seizure?"

"I don't remember," Will says. "I told you, I was losing time."

"Who did you kill, Will Graham?" Alana says, putting her pen down. "And why?"

"There was...one of the killers I was hunting." Will has tried so hard not to think about it. He stops for a moment to put it together for himself. "He was murdering truck-stop prostitutes. Not terribly unique, as serial killers go, but he wasn't leaving the bodies along the highway, he would dress them up, like dolls. Leave them in public places. It was grotesque, like he was mocking them. At the time, I was also...The FBI had me consulting on the Chesapeake Ripper cases. A few cycles had been missed and they were concerned the Ripper might have fled to Mexico, or something. He'd killed an FBI trainee, so...I spent more time trying to think like him than I did as myself. When I caught up with the Dollmaker, I...He had a gun. I had a gun. But I didn't shoot him. I took him apart with my bare hands and made a display of his corpse. Like he did, like the Ripper did. I didn't run. I was still standing there, admiring my creation, when they caught me."

"And you pled guilty?"

Will slumps down in his chair. "I was. I am. On the plus side, they don't have to worry about the Ripper anymore."

He immediately wishes he hadn't said that. Alana keeps her composure, but she's struggling, he can see it.

"I'm sorry," Will says. "I've only known Hannibal as a killer. I imagine he was very charming. He is charming, when he tries. Not that he tries." He stops talking before he can make it any worse.

Alana rallies. "How aware of your actions were you?"

"It took a little time for it to come back to me. Now I remember doing it. I remember thinking it would be beautiful, and...righteous." Will turns his wrists over in the handcuffs. "But the dead were talking to me, and I was a monster made of hunger and anger, antlers like wings. I was a god. Then I woke up in the hospital, and I was myself. I was a teacher, a profiler, I had seven dogs which were probably going to eat me when I died alone. I was weird, but...I wasn't that. That's not who I am. That's how I saw the Ripper."

"Hannibal Lecter?" Alana says.

"Yeah," Will says, uncomfortable. "That's how I saw Hannibal." He doesn't want to talk about it, suddenly; the way Hannibal sounds when he's reading aloud in French. The way he sighs in irritation when reading stupid letters, the way Will is certain Hannibal doesn't know he's doing it. The way he can be so cruel one moment, and so gentle the next. His obsessive neatness. His mouth on Will's cock. The way he likes to hear Will choke on his. The way he wouldn't have tried to help Will if he'd been ganged up on in the showers, when they first met, but how he waded in when Will was outnumbered in the shed. He's known the Ripper for so long that sliding into this strange relationship has been easier than it maybe should be. He knows what kind of a monster Hannibal is, and he knows what sort of a man he is.

Alana is asking him something. Will has to get her to repeat it. "I said, you were stabbed in New Orleans when you failed to shoot an armed, hostile subject?"

Will nods, distracted. "I don't have a history of violent behaviour, if that's what you're fishing for. I rescued stray dogs and I've held down three steady jobs. Most of my coworkers and students liked me fine. Nice, a little awkward, but an okay guy. I've had long-term relationships with women that ended because they couldn't deal with my...personality quirks. Most women appreciate a man who can meet their eyes."

It's been a long time, it feels like, since he couldn't look Hannibal in the eye. He's not even sure when that happened. He ghosts through the rest of the interview. It's all trivialities. He showed no signs of being a killer and then he was sick, and now that he's better he's not a killer anymore. It's a good defense.

Alana shakes his hand. It lingers, and then her iron hold on her emotions slips.

"We cooked meals together," Alana says, the words bursting out of her. "He made me beer, and we played the Theremin, we graded papers, and he edited my research, and he wore the

ugliest fucking ties you have ever seen, with plaid suits, and it *worked* for him. And we cooked together, oh my god, all this time."

Will reaches across the table and takes her hand in both of his, handcuffs rattling against the table. "He is more capable of emotion than he would have you believe. If he said he cared for you, then he did. If he cooked with you he was sharing a secret part of himself that he couldn't share openly. There is nothing wrong with you, Doctor Bloom. There are a great many things wrong with Hannibal Lecter, but it wasn't the killer in him that was drawn to you. Whatever he has in him that enjoys beautiful music, and terrible suits, and whatever else brings him pleasure, that was why he wanted you in his life. Because his life is full of ugliness and he tries to fill it with beauty."

"So why is he helping you?" she asks, bitterness in her voice.

Will wonders if he should feel insulted by that.

"There's no beauty in a mental institute," Alana says, but he can't tell if it's a recovery from her last statement, or just adding on to it. "They'll love getting their hands on someone with his pathology."

"He wants me free," Will says. "Beyond that I haven't worked it out yet."

Chapter 11

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Will finds Hannibal outside, sitting on the bleachers with the Hispanics arguing in rapid Spanish. Duct Tape is sitting at the front of the group, looking forlorn.

"If she cheated on her previous husband, with you I might add, why do you think marrying her is going to make any difference? You have no way of knowing if you are her only lover. Are you even certain the child is yours?" Hannibal says, exasperated. "Tú querías mi consejo. Ese es mi consejo. No te cases con ella."

"Hey," Will says.

"You're empathetic," Hannibal says. "You tell him. Marrying a woman who has a history of infidelities is not a smart thing to do."

Duct Tape looks at him expectantly. "Free therapy?" Will asks. The idea of asking Hannibal Lecter for mental health advice seems insane to Will, but then he remembers this man's prison nickname is Duct Tape and holds his peace. "Don't marry her," Will says. He doesn't have much of an opinion one way or the other, considering he knows nothing about what they're talking of, but Hannibal seems certain.

The group begins arguing amongst themselves again. Hannibal pats the bench next to him and Will sits. "How is Alana Bloom?" Hannibal asks.

"Pissed at you," Will says. "I can't believe you asked your ex-lover to help me."

"She is good at what she does," Hannibal says with a fatalistic air. "She is the best at what she does."

"You killed people and fed them to her. That's a lot of forgiveness to ask."

"I'm neither asking her to forgive me, nor offering to make her dinner. I'm asking her to help amend a miscarriage of justice." Hannibal puts his arms up on the seat behind him, closes his eyes and turns his face up to the sun. "I'm having a suit made for you, for the trial. I shudder to think what polyblend monstrosity you wore the last time."

Will rubs his hand over his beard. "Hannibal, you can't do that."

"I have a lot of money in accounts all over the world. So I can," Hannibal says. "I would like to see you in a nice suit, so I will. And I had the opportunity to use the phones earlier. So I did."

If Will had enough hair to pull, he would have pulled at it. "Hannibal, you can't because that's not how the law works."

"I also spoke to Brauer," Hannibal says. "We discussed your upcoming trial. As well as the notion that you cannot be held criminally responsible for what amounts to self-defense while ill, we decided it would be easier on you if you didn't have to lie on the stand."

Will groans into his hands. "Hannibal," he says. "You can't talk to my lawyer."

"I'm insane," Hannibal says mildly. "I'm an insane person who took an obsessive shine to you."

"Well that's the truth," Will mutters.

Hannibal, with great dignity, does not reply to that.

"So what am I supposed to say when they ask why you're trying to get me out of here, if the whole point is that you're obsessed. Wouldn't you want me to stay here with you?"

A self-satisfied smile creeps across Hannibal's face. "One would think."

"He's crazy," one of the inmates - Bareback, if Will recalls correctly - says. "That's the whole point."

Will does not think he needs life advice from a man who voluntarily goes by the nickname Bareback. He also probably shouldn't be listening to the Chesapeake Ripper, but apparently, this is his life. "If this gets fucked up because you can't leave well enough alone," Will says, "you'll have no one to blame but yourself."

"Language," Hannibal says, but he's still smiling. One of his fingers strokes gently at the nape of Will's neck. "I want you to tell the courts the truth about me. That I offered you protection, that I have been cruel to you, that I made you a target for the Aryans. That I gave you my murders because this place will destroy you by inches and I don't wish to see that."

Will wants to know what it is, exactly, Hannibal does want. He doubts he'd get a straight answer though, so he keeps his thoughts to himself. Instead, he watches the sun catch on the grey in Hannibal's hair. The bruises on Hannibal's neck are purple and black, red at the edges. Will wants to bite them. He wants to make more.

That night he lets Hannibal fuck him again. There's no alternative but for Hannibal to take him dry so Hannibal eats him out until he's panting into the sheets. He puts Will on his back and watches him. It feels different, Hannibal feels bigger like this and Will scratches his own claim onto Hannibal's skin, leaves bruises and bite marks so he doesn't shake apart from the pain, and pleasure, and the way Hannibal just stares at him.

"I would like to do this somewhere in the sunlight," Hannibal says. "Spread you out across expensive sheets and listen to every noise you make. See what music I can pull out of the instrument of your body."

Will groans, mortified. Hannibal puts one hand over Will's mouth to keep him quiet. He tries to turn his face away but Hannibal's hand keeps his head still.

"I would enjoy seeing you display yourself. I could watch you touch yourself. Your embarrassment, and arousal. Perhaps have you finger yourself open."

He's not thrusting into Will so much as he is rocking them together, cock moving inside Will just enough to stimulate Will's prostate. Will lingers on the edge of orgasm, unable to come like that, but so close that he wants to scream. Hannibal is breathing hard with the effort of not pounding Will into the mattress, iron control showing cracks in the clench of his teeth and the sweat dripping off him onto Will.

Will's sore and aching, his pleas muffled behind Hannibal's hand, when Hannibal finally wraps his hand around Will's cock and strokes him over the edge. He comes inside Will this time, groaning Will's name before he pulls out, both of them wincing a little. Hannibal doesn't even bother to get out of the bunk to get something to clean them with, he just lies there, catching his breath, the imprint of Will's teeth ringed around one nipple.

Will traces the lines on Hannibal's shoulders where he dug in his nails. One of them is beading blood. He can't tell how much of what he feels is his own, and how much of it is Hannibal. He's never been so rough with a partner before. But then, he's never been with another man, or with a serial killer, or with anyone in a prison, so maybe it's not so strange. He kind of likes being able to visit this sort of violence on another person and have it be something that isn't truly hurtful.

"If I wasn't so tired I might start feeling inadequate that your attention so quickly wanders elsewhere," Hannibal says.

"You? The narcissist?" Will rubs his knuckles over the beard burn he's left on Hannibal's jaw and throat. "Who says it's wandering?"

Something in Hannibal's face softens. He is relaxed, Will realizes, in a way he hasn't been until now. Will kisses him, and strokes his fingers down Hannibal's cock just to screw with him. Hannibal grabs his wrist and pulls his hand away.

"I am older than you by ten years," Hannibal says. "Take pity."

"Or what?" Will says.

Hannibal pushes what feels like two fingers inside Will and Will makes an utterly humiliating whimper. There's no way he's getting hard again, he doesn't get hard again, but it feels amazing. Will crawls on top of Hannibal, letting him take his weight, knees spread wide around Hannibal's thighs.

Hannibal rubs his prostate until Will is leaking all over them both, precome matting the hair on Hannibal's body down. Will is practically sobbing when his body spasms with something that feels a lot like an orgasm. He still isn't hard but he collapses against Hannibal's body, totally spent.

Hannibal strokes his back possessively. "Still feel like mocking me?"

Will shakes his head, too tired to speak. Hannibal still doesn't bother to get up but he uses one of their shirts to half-heartedly wipe them down.

Lockdown happens so early that they doze for a while and wake up long before lights out. Hannibal makes Will get up long enough for them both to wash in the sink and then they both lie back down. Will considers initiating another round, but he's too tired. He listens to Hannibal recite Lithuanian folktales, realizing he's able to recognize the odd word here and there. When Hannibal falls silent, not wandering his mind palace, but just content to lie quietly Will's brain begins to spin again.

"Were your parents afraid of you?" Will wonders. He wonders if Hannibal tortured animals as a child, not out of malice, but out of curiosity to see how living things worked. How they could be taken apart but never put back together again.

Hannibal strokes his thumb over the skin behind Will's ear. "The servants were," he says, and isn't that a story for another day. "But my father was not. It was not our way to parent the way Americans do. I would have known him as an adult, had he lived. But he was distant. Not unloving, but distant. My mother I saw more of. She might have been afraid, but she put my sister into my charge, so I doubt she was either. Or perhaps her fear convinced her I would be a worthy protector. I suspect they knew I didn't form attachments to anyone, that no one really mattered to me. But she did, my Mischa."

"You have a sister?" Will wonders why she never comes to visit until Hannibal says, "She died," and then he begins to understand why Hannibal stopped talking.

He envisions a small, strange little boy. Dark eyes frighteningly perceptive, incredibly smart, and inhumanly cruel. His silence was a threat. His refusal to submit was a rebuke. It was a penance.

Hannibal, perceptive as always, asks, "Why do you never have visitors?"

"You don't either," Will says.

"Alana did for a time," Hannibal replies. "I told her not to. It upset her and it didn't matter to me if she came or not. I told you, William, I have formed very few attachments in my life that I cannot do without. She was not one of them."

"Jesus, you're cold," Will says. Hannibal's arched eyebrow speaks volumes. "I didn't have friends," Will says. "I had colleagues and students. Mostly I had whiskey and my dogs."

Nothing in Hannibal's face changes that Will can point to, but he looks enamoured nevertheless. "You were as alone as I was. Because of what you can see and how easily you could become that thing."

"I'm not a killer," Will protests. Hannibal doesn't reply.

Chapter End Notes

Hopefully Hannibal says:
You wanted my advice. That's my advice. Do not marry her.

Chapter 12

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Will has a meeting with Brauer the next day, which he isn't looking forward to at all. Brauer is more smug than he was the last time.

"I don't know what you did to make the Ripper so interested in you - and please God never tell me - but this is going to be a walk in the park. I've spoken to the DA and so far so good. We had a hypothetical, off the record sort of conversation and eventually she came out and said that they don't care why Lecter likes you, why he's providing your lawyer, or why he's coming clean either. The deal is simple - you provide the DA with evidence required to prosecute Hannibal Lecter, Alana Bloom testifies on your behalf as to your mental incompetence at the time of your crime. You'll be released with time served. During this time Lecter will be brought up on charges, you'll appear in court to provide your testimony wearing what I can tell you is a really nice suit. He'll go to the nut house because from what I can tell that guy's brain is a sack full of cats, you'll have a meeting with Lecter's lawyer and she'll fill you in on how he's giving you full access to his estate. Which, to be honest, is also totally weird, but good news for you."

Will gives Brauer a look that he hopes illustrates how unimpressed he is by their collusion. "Am I seriously the only one who wants to know what Hannibal's up to?"

Brauer shrugs. "I'm not paid to be curious. My job is to get you out of here. So, any questions?"

"When do we start?" Will asks.

"We already have," Brauer says. "You sign here-" he pushes a stack of papers across the table to Will. "Alana testifies next week; she'll want to see you again before that, I assume. By this time next month, you'll be out of here."

Will's cast won't even be off by then. "The law doesn't work that fast," Will says.

"It does when you have a chance to bring down the Chesapeake Ripper," Brauer says, setting a pen down on top of all the paper. "So start signing."

By the time Will is done with the requisite paperwork, his hand aches, his wrist aches, and he wants to find Hannibal so he can yell at him. Not about anything in particular, but the last time they fought it seemed to go well enough. He's hoping that, one way or the other, he'll get his frustration out.

Brauer stops him before the guards can take him back to A-block. "Look, don't tell him about your exit date. I know it's Lecter setting you up to leave, but the last thing we want is for him to get cold feet and change his mind."

"He won't hurt me," Will says.

"If he thinks he's going to lose you?" Brauer shrugs. "People have done crazier things. I just don't want him deciding the best way to keep you with him for always is to eat you."

When Will is escorted back to his cell he realizes everyone is in lockdown. A sick feeling starts to build in his stomach. One of the inmates is pulling a mop and bucket towards a notoriously dangerous hallway and Will can see blood creeping around the corner. There's arterial spray arching up onto the far wall, dark, dripping red. Ten pints of blood all over the walls and floor. The smell is familiar to Will. Thick and meaty, abattoir and outhouse, the sharp sting of bleach.

"Open on seventy-three," the CO says into his radio and the cell door opens.

Hannibal isn't inside.

"Hands," the CO says.

Will turns around so they can uncuff him. "Where's Hannibal Lecter?" Will says. He doesn't get a reply, except for, "Close on seventy-three."

The door slides shuts behind the CO and Will lunges for the grill, slamming his good hand against it. He hasn't felt this trapped since his first few weeks. "Hey! Where's Hannibal? What happened? What did they do to him? "

A night stick slams against the grill, narrowly missing his fingers. "Settle down, Graham."

"Fuck you," Will shouts, voice cracking with panic. "Just tell me what happened."

He can't see, but he can hear the CO walking away. He pounds on the door of his cell but his only reply is other inmates shouting at him to shut up. If anyone calls out the answer to his question, it's lost in the jeering.

Will paces the cell - three fast steps, turn, another three. He feels like he's doing laps underwater, pushing off the walls with each turn. He's dizzy and sick, but he can't make himself stop. The walls are cinderblock; he'd break bones if he punched them. He wants to beat his head against the door until someone comes.

They're kept in lockdown until the lights go out. Will kicks the cell door hard enough to hurt and curses. Hannibal's books are still on the shelf. His bedding hasn't been removed. Will reassures himself that if Hannibal was dead, they would have taken his stuff.

He paces until he's tired, and then sits on Hannibal's bunk and waits. The cell is too hot. It's too cold. It's too big, it's crushing down around him. Will digs his fingers into his head, nails cutting into his scalp. He reconstructs scene after scene around the very little he'd been able to see. Each one is worse. Each one ends with Hannibal zipped into a body-bag and taken away.

Will takes the Count of Monte Cristo down from the shelf and clutches it to himself like a talisman. It's big enough to cross his arms over protectively; a child with a stuffed toy. It's

pathetic, he tells himself. There's no use worrying himself into the ground. Either Hannibal is alive, or he is not. And if he is not, is the life of the Chesapeake Ripper worth mourning?

It feels like days, not hours, before the sun comes up. He waits, and waits, and finally Crawford is at the door to his cell.

Will stands against the far wall. Maybe the Chesapeake Ripper isn't any great loss, but prison has made him selfish and hardened his heart, and he cannot do without Hannibal. He doesn't know what he'll do without Hannibal.

"Please," is all Will can say. He's not sure if he's shaking, or if he only feels so unsteady.

Crawford motions for him to sit down and Will does. "He's still alive," Crawford says without preamble and Will feels like he can breathe for the first time since he saw the blood on the floor, panting like he's run a marathon. "The Aryans jumped him again."

"How..." Will swallows, throat clicking. "How bad is it?"

"He'll live," Crawford says, somewhat evasively. He pats Will on the shoulder in an awkward attempt to be supportive.

Will nods, still unable to let go of the fucking book. "Can I see him?"

Crawford's face is stern, sympathetic, but stern. "Not a chance in hell, Graham. I'll keep you updated, alright? Don't worry about Lecter. He's been in fights before and the bastard's always come out on top. Get some breakfast, stretch your legs, get some air." He pats Will's shoulder again and leaves.

Will's still sitting there, trying to remember what breathing is supposed to feel like when Zee edges in. "Hey, buddy," Zee says. "I guess you heard, huh? You wanna know what happened?" He doesn't bother to wait for Will's reply. "They jumped him on death row - you know, that fucked up blind corridor no one likes? Andrews, Jackhammer, and Hall. Got him pretty good before the COs caught them. Lecter killed Hall."

Zee's a little pale. Normally he's all over prison gossip but Will bets that he's never seen a bloodbath before. He's a professional fuckup, not a murderer. Not everyone gets the crash course on serial killers. He rubs at the scruff on his neck and chin, shuffling nervously.

"Zee," Will prompts.

"Lecter ripped Hall's fucking throat out with his teeth. If you saw blood, it was at least, like, half Hall's probably. Shit, Graham, it was all up the wall, fucking everywhere. Hall was screaming and then he was just...gurgling, and then he wasn't doing nothing. Lecter was covered in blood. Totally drenched. It took everyone a while to realize how bad he was hurt."

"How bad?" Will feels cold and sweaty.

Zee runs a hand through his already crazy hair. "He was holding his guts in, man, with his hands. It was fucked up."

"Jesus, Zee," Will says.

Zee sits down on the bunk. "So, anyway. They took Lecter to the actual ER, you know. At a real hospital. Jackhammer took the fall so he's in the hole and he's not gonna see daylight again. They'll get him for another attempted murder and he'll spend the rest of his life in super max. Andrews walked away like a bitch, cut Lecter open and left Hall to die just before the COs got there. Jackhammer's a racist piece of shit, but he was trying to save Hall, you know? Not a prayer, and Lecter's sitting there, propped up against one wall, fucking smiling, holding himself together with his hands. They airlifted him out."

Will is finally able to put the book down. The paperback is dented from his grip. Hannibal's going to be pissed, he thinks. Then: it's going to take two months for Hannibal to recover. Brauer said he'd be out of prison in one. No one's going to stop Andrews from finishing the job he started if Will's not there.

"Can I get you anything?" Zee asks. "Hey, man, you okay?"

Will waves an absent hand. "Yeah," he says. "Just...just thinking."

"Okay," Zee says. "Well, you know where I live, I guess."

Will meets his eye. "Yeah, yes. Sorry. Thank you." Zee leaves him to it, but Will barely notices, already a hundred miles away in his own head.

He can picture it in perfect, horrible detail. Hall on the ground, blood in an arc as he fell, eyes wide with terror. Jackhammer on his knees, trying to put pressure on the raw mess of Hall's throat, watching his friend die. Hannibal so covered in blood, his face, his jumpsuit, his hands, that the COs don't see the jagged wound across his belly. Will watches Hannibal register the pain, watches Andrews walk away as Hannibal takes two unsteady steps back and thuds into the wall. Hannibal tries to keep his feet but he's losing too much blood and he slides down to the floor. He's not afraid, not overly concerned with his own fate. He is in pain, he is dying, but maybe he will be saved. Maybe he won't.

Will's going to have fucking words with Hannibal about his lackadaisical attitude about his own life.

Will knows what he's planning is stupid. He knows Hannibal would beat the shit out of him if he was there to hear about it, but he's not. Will feels irrationally angry about that.

He changes into fresh clothing, washes his face in the sink and stares at himself in the mirror for a minute or two. He barely recognises himself anymore. It's as though Hannibal has been the small pains that cause calluses to form, protecting him from greater harm. He's not sure who's the oyster and who's the pearl in the metaphor. If Hannibal is the great weight pressing coal into diamond until Will's skin is hard, impenetrable, and he can cut through almost anything with his edges.

Will puts on his glasses, picks up the book again and carries it with him to the mess. He sits with Zee and Price, shoulders slumped in a picture of defeat, and ignores his food favour of

reading. He can see Katz watching him. She's probably going to be the hardest to fool. He adjusts his glasses and doesn't have to pretend disinterest in his breakfast.

He sits in his cell afterwards, playing Go against himself. It's so confusing he's pretty sure he manages to lose both positions, which shouldn't even be possible. A CO circles by every so often . He's not sure if they're worried about him, or worried about what he might do. Will's posture is lethargic, worn down, listless. His face shows he is afraid.

He watches them watching him.

When they are allowed, he goes outside. It's getting too hot now, and tempers are starting to reflect that. He hugs his book to his chest and heads for the bleachers. Duct Tape shakes his hand, brings him in for a hug, and slaps him on the back.

"Sorry, man," he says. "Mictlantecuhtli went down bad but fucking Hall, man, pinche puerco. Hall went down like he deserved. Lecter did good taking out that maricón. No offence, man."

Will isn't all that sure what Duct Tape said, but he doubts any of it was flattering. "Thanks," he says anyway. The COs aren't within earshot but he keeps his voice low anyway. "I need...Can you get me..."

Duct Tape raises his eyebrows. "Necesitas una arma?"

"Yeah," Will says. "Necesitas una arma."

Duct Tape says something to Luis, who heads the group. Luis gets down off the bleachers and comes right up to Will. They're about the same height and Will makes himself meet Luis' hard stare. He's got teardrop tattoos on his face and the Mexican eagle and snake on his throat. He's got tattoos that say he's a pimp and a drug dealer, that he's a murderer several times over.

But Will took a man apart with his bare hands and put him together into something new. Luis is dangerous, but Will is crazy.

Will can be anyone. He lets himself be Luis for a moment, then Hannibal, and then himself again. It's easier to shed the skins he wears now. Constantly battling with Hannibal has left him very aware of where he ends and begins, even as those lines are constantly redrawn.

"You planning something crazy?" Luis says, finally. Will doesn't think he's heard Luis speak English before but he's got a solid Baltimore accent when he does.

"Can you help me or not?" Will asks.

Luis looks him up and down, taking his measure. "Anyone asks?"

Will hugs his book to his chest. "I got nothing from no one."

Luis nods once and that seems to be the end of that conversation.

It's not until just before lock down that Duct Tape wanders by where he's sitting with Zee and Price, and slips him something sharp. A wicked looking shiv made out of - if Will's not mistaken - part of one of the beds. Will tucks it into the pages of the Count of Monte Cristo.

"Ain't nobody likes Andrews," Duct Tape says. "Luis says you don't owe us, you do this."

Will inclines his head in the smallest of nods and goes back to his cell, ignoring the horrified looks Price is giving him. He sits at the desk where the COs can see him, wraps himself in an attitude of sadness and fear, pretends to read and makes his plans.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you to everyone who pointed out that Will's reply is incorrect Spanish. In that case it was supposed to be wrong! He's just parroting back what Duct Tape says.

Chapter 13

The heat doesn't get any better. Will feels like it's paring him down to his bones. He sticks to Hannibal's routine: works out, showers, forces himself to eat something at every meal. They toss the cells twice in a week as violence begins to escalate between prisoners, but don't find his shiv.

Will decides Brauer can fuck himself and gets Price to shave his head for him again. He trims his beard close and he's still too pretty, he's still an ex-cop, but it's not vulnerability in his eyes any more. Someone tries to give him shit in the showers and Will smashes his face into the wall, grabs his balls and squeezes so hard it's fifty-fifty if the guy will have to go to the med ward. He uses the foot of a chair in the main room to break a few of the little bones in another prisoner's foot when that prisoner tries to get a little too friendly.

He's smart, he's fast, and no one's going to admit to Will hurting them. No one catches him.

The Latinos aren't protecting him; they don't care that much but out of respect for Hannibal, they're not averse to letting him hang out with them. He sits with them at lunch sometimes, learns some Spanish, learns how to cuss someone out in four different dialects. The more he distances himself from Zee and Price, the less likely they are to get hurt in the crossfire.

He doesn't find out who, but someone finds out about his record. He thinks it'll be a bloodbath when A-block realizes he was law enforcement, but apparently gruesome murder and uncanny empathy trump forensic lab rat and teacher. Guys he's never spoken to want to know if it's true: can he actually become someone else. Can he read minds?

Will tries very hard not to be rude when he tells them to fuck off.

Annoyingly, it just makes people agree that he can actually read minds.

Zee manages to corner him during rec. "You really do that shit?" he asks. "Don't give me those eyes, Graham. You know what I'm talking about. You told me you killed someone when you were sick. You didn't tell me you did any of that other fucked up shit."

Will flexes his wrist inside his cast, trying to figure out if he can take the damn thing off sooner rather than later. "Yeah, I did it, you know I did. You want to know if I'm sorry."

Zee wants him to be regretful, scared even of what's inside him because Zee's scared of what's inside Will. He wants to be reassured. Will wishes he could give him that but there are people listening, pretending they're not, ready to pass around the latest tidbit of information.

"I was," Will says. "I was scared, and sorry, and I pled guilty. But I was scared because of how easy it was, sorry because I didn't regret it, and I pled guilty because there's so much murder inside of me, I didn't know where it ended and I began any more. Now I do."

Zee swallows visibly, and his voice is unsteady when he says, "I don't think Lecter's good for you, man."

Will smiles crookedly. "Hannibal's the best I'm going to get. I wouldn't inflict me on anyone else. Not after what I did. I can't hurt him."

Zee looks sad. "Graham," he says. "Will. Listen to me: Lecter's whole thing is to get into people's heads and make them do fucked up stuff."

"Zee," Will says gently, "I didn't know Hannibal when I caught the Dollmaker, broke every joint in his body, strung him up like a puppet with hooks through his skin, carved up his face to make it look like a mask, and watched him suffocate to death under his own body weight. It took half an hour and I watched every second of it."

"Shit," Zee says, face crumpling. Will walks away before he can do more damage, whispers of the terrible thing he is flowing around him like water.

He doesn't feel the weight of invisible antlers any more. The strange beast that was crawling out of his skin has a name now, a face; it shares his cell, not his head. Will is a creature of his own making: a nameless, formless thing becoming, destroying, becoming again.

Will sleeps on Hannibal's bunk, wrapped in the sheets that still smell like both of them and counts the days. He goes through Hannibal's mail - none of it especially interesting, most of it the usual weirdness that people send to murderers. He thumbs through all of Hannibal's books, not sure what he's looking for. There aren't any hidden papers in the pages. Nothing scribbled in the margins. The only writing Hannibal does is in his notebooks. Will deeply resents that they're all in what he assumes is Lithuanian. Probably coded Lithuanian at that.

He misses Hannibal intensely. Without Hannibal being overbearing all the time, without something to push back against, Will feels like he's stumbling.

He pours over Hannibal's sketchbooks. They're filled with classic facades and busy modern cities, the streets of Paris, London, New York. Castles, houses, railroads, and docksides. He draws classic nudes, anatomical diagrams, studies of hands, portraits of the residents of A-block, and people Will's never seen before.

Will isn't sure if he's upset or not that Hannibal doesn't draw him until he looks at some of Hannibal's more recent recreations of famous pieces and sees their faces in the agony of saint Sebastian, the death of Patroclus, Hercules in the garments of Queen Omphale...a number of things Will doesn't recognize. Will thinks he probably should be worried that Hannibal frequently draws them with one or both dying or dead, but then, Hannibal is in hospital after being gutted, so maybe he's not so wrong.

There's one that looks like an adaptation of Hades and Persephone as Mictecacihuatl and Mictlantecuhtli, except that it's Will instead of a woman. The detail of the costuming is intense. A three-headed dog lies in shadows, one head snarling, one mild, one gazing adoringly at the figure that is clearly Will. In theory it puts the viewer in the place of the dead soul, where they would be judged by the gods. But only two heads of the dog actually look out at the audience.

Will wonders when Hannibal finds the time. If he ever sleeps, or if he's awake half the night. Will pulls the picture carefully from the book and pins it on the bottom of his bunk, so he can

look at it when he's lying on Hannibal's. He thinks about it more than he probably should; tries to figure out what he wants to say to Hannibal about it. If he should say anything at all.

One of the Aryans comes after him in the gym and Will punches him in the throat, waits until he's on the ground, gasping for air, and then drops a 300lb barbell onto his chest, pinning him down and probably breaking a few ribs in the process.

Will stands over the man, watching him struggle to breathe. "If you live," he says, "tell Andrews to stop being such a coward. If he wants me, he can come for me himself."

He is calm, and centered. He puts a hand over his heart to feel it beating steady and strong. Will goes back to his cell, lies on the bunk, and stares up at Hannibal's drawing.

Doctor Bloom comes to see him again. They gaze at each other across the table for long moments until Will cracks and says, "How is he?" because of course she will have gone to visit Hannibal. If only to confront him.

"A terrible patient," she says. "All the doctors hate him, but he gets on well with the nurses. I guess he spent enough time working in a hospital to know not to annoy the nurses. He's always been well-liked by those around him." Alana's expression is full of regret. "You're right. He can be very charming when he wants to be. I slapped him," she admits.

Will shrugs a little. "I probably would as well, if I was in your position." He can see her fears, poorly concealed, and he likes her well enough, so Will says, "He's not escaping the hospital. Not after major abdominal surgery. And even if he did, which he can't, he wouldn't try to hurt you. He likes you." Will tells himself he is not jealous. There is no use being jealous of her because Hannibal told her not to visit and eventually Hannibal will tell him the same thing.

He tries not to think about that.

"I'm not here to talk about Hannibal Lecter," Alana says firmly. "I'd like to talk a bit more about your encephalitis."

As they talk, Will realizes that whatever changes are happening to him, they're enough to worry someone like Alana Bloom. He apologizes, says that he's been putting on a mean front ever since Hannibal went to hospital. He softens his posture, his face, his voice and watches her relax in increments. Will wonders if this is what Hannibal felt like all the time, before prison, when he had to adjust every word he spoke, every gesture, to appear as something he wasn't.

Alana Bloom will speak to the judge some time in the next two weeks. Will thanks her, profusely, a little awkwardly. He goes to shake her hand and is embarrassed by the handcuffs. She is kind to him.

When he gets back to the cell, Will stands in front of the mirror and watches to see if there's any visible change as he lets Will Graham, traumatized victim of a terrible illness, recede. It's like watching the tide. Impossible to see the changes as they're happening, but the beginning and end are vastly different.

Before two weeks have passed, Hannibal is brought back to prison and confined to the medical ward. Before three weeks have passed, Hannibal returns to A-block, pale and tired, Katz pushing him in a wheelchair. Will can see the other inmates circling, smelling blood in the water.

He takes over from Katz, pushing Hannibal along. Hannibal gives him a displeased look about one thing or another, but Will can feel an idiotic grin threatening to break over his own face. He schools his mouth into a line and gives Katz his full attention.

"He's not to exert himself. If necessary, we'll put him in solitary while he recovers. You let us know, Graham. Coughing, sneezing, laughing, this shit can set him back so no funny business. No fighting."

"Ms. Katz," Hannibal says with great patience, "I was, in fact, a trauma surgeon and a medical doctor. I know what to do."

Katz's expression is three hundred percent unimpressed. "Yeah, well, you're the one getting into prison fights, so surgeon and doctor or not, I'm going to tell your cellmate that you can't be walking around. And I swear to God, Graham, if you fuck him, he could actually die."

Will fails to smother a laugh. "I'll bear that in mind," he says.

Katz purses her lips. "Get him back to your cell," she says, dismissing them.

Will helps Hannibal out of the chair and onto the bunk. The trip from the med ward to A-block has visibly tired him.

"You shaved your head again," Hannibal says, hand curled protectively over his wound. Will sits in the wheelchair and rolls himself back and forth with a rocking movement.

"Yeah, well, it's been hot as Satan's ass-crack and there was no one here to tell me not to." Will delights in the disgruntled expression on Hannibal's face. Hannibal wants to reprimand him for his language but he has no leverage now. Will wonders if he's worried; if he thinks Will might hurt him, now he can. Or if Will might break off their deal, now Hannibal can't protect him. Hannibal is still hard to read. When it comes to the Ripper, Will knows him inside and out. When it comes to Hannibal, the man, he's a little more inscrutable.

Will wants to put his hands on every inch of Hannibal's body and access the damage. But the door to the cell is still open. He'll have to wait. "How was the hospital?"

"Tedious. How was it here?"

Will cards a hand through Hannibal's hair. It needs a wash. It must be driving Hannibal up the wall. "I went through your stuff," Will says. "You draw me a lot." Hannibal frowns and Will wants to kiss it off his face. "Don't worry, I didn't tell anyone what a secret romantic you are."

"Hm," Hannibal says. He's looking up at the picture Will stuck to the bottom of his bunk. "I did tell you not to go through my things."

"You implied it," Will says blithely. "I decided that doesn't count. Shut up, go to sleep, I'll wash your hair for you when you wake up."

He waits until Hannibal's eyes have closed. Hannibal's breathing is the almost-snore of the heavily medicated. Will kisses his slack mouth, gets the Count of Monte Cristo down off the shelf and sets it next to Hannibal, taking the shiv out of the back pages.

No one really sees him leave the cell. He makes himself forgettable. There is nothing in his posture to antagonize other prisoners. There is no weakness, there is no aggression. He might as well be smoke.

He gets to the corner of death row and finds Andrews in the crowd, playing cards at one of the tables. Andrews looks up and Will catches his eye, winks and blows him a kiss. Will turns the corner onto death row - as empty and dangerous as always - and waits.

Chapter 14

Chapter Notes

> There is more homophobic language from a random character. He is a terrible person and his bad language in no way reflects my own views. Just sayin'.

Andrews is a big man. He's tall and heavy with muscle from prison-lifting; the kind of guy who wears fat like armour. He's got white power tattoos on his neck, his shaved head, his hands, peeking out from the collar of his jumpsuit. His face is a half-collapsed ruin from Hannibal's teeth and Will's blade.

"We don't need this to escalate," Will says. "I don't even know how it started. But Hannibal hurt you, you hurt Hannibal...maybe we can all just...not."

"I'm going to cut off your fucking fag dick and stuff it so far down Lecter's throat he chokes on it," Andrews says.

Will takes a deep breath and lets it out slowly. There's a feeling in his stomach and he's not sure if he feels sick or if he's excited. His heart beats steady and even.

Andrews lunges at him, and Will takes two quick steps back so that the full weight of both of them goes crashing into the door to the laundry room. It has a notoriously shitty lock and a good push will usually open it. Another reason death row is so dangerous. You can disappear into the laundry room, loud with industrial machines, and Will knows more inmates have been raped or killed in that room than in any other in the prison. Their combined weight makes it bounce open and slam closed again, denting the wall.

Will scrambles back, giving himself space as Andrews staggers, off balance. He is only going to get one decent shot at this, and if he fucks it up, Will is very aware that a life sentence for attempted murder is the very best outcome. If he fucks it up it's pretty likely he'll be getting a fast ride out of prison in a body bag.

He holds his ground when Andrews comes at him again but he can't do much to stop the swing Andrews takes at his stomach. The air rushes out of him but he fights the urge to double over. He can't use his hands, can't risk busting up his knuckles, but he throws an elbow as hard as he can, catching Andrews in the face, where there's no significant muscle or flesh to protect him.

Andrews hits him again, right in the chest. It's like being hit with a two-by-four and he falls over backwards. Will's head cracks against the floor and blood floods his mouth. He thinks he's just bitten his cheek but whatever the damage it makes it harder to swallow, to breathe.

"You think I can't pull out your little faggot guts the way I did to Lecter?"

Will, prone on his back, gasping, waiting for his diaphragm to stop spasming so he can breathe, gives Andrews the finger. He curls up as Andrews kicks him in the side, managing to mostly catch Andrews' foot instead of taking the full force of the blow.

Andrews gets down on the floor and puts his hands around Will's throat. He doesn't bother to pin his arms down with his knees, just chokes Will out.

"Here's what I'll do for you," Andrews says. "I'm going to fuck you, pretty girl, and then I'm going to cut off your cock. I'll leave the door open so probably someone will find you before you bleed to death. When you come back from the hospital you can be my good little girl, huh? How's that sound?"

Will's vision is starting to go dark at the edges. He smiles up at Andrews as he slides the shiv out from between his cast and his skin. Andrews has a moment to look surprised at Will's lack of fear before Will jams the shiv into his stomach and yanks upwards.

It's a better blade than the last one. Jagged and sharp. Big enough to cut deep into Andrews' skin.

Will pushes Andrews to the side before he can collapse on top of him. He goes over hard, blood pouring from his stomach, the slick yellow-pink of intestines just visible. Will grabs a pair of socks from a nearby pile and shoves them into Andrews' open mouth.

There isn't time to do the things Will wants to do to this man. So he just sticks his hands into the warm cavity of Andrews' body and scoops out his guts, letting them spill messily to the side. Any screaming is muffled by the rumble of the dryers and the makeshift gag. It's not going to be neat, or artistic, but Will works quickly to do what he can.

By the time he's finished, Will is drenched in blood and gore. He strips quickly and stuffs his clothes into one of the washing machines that's already on. He scrubs himself down in one of the huge sinks and takes clean clothing from the piles of nearly folded laundry. By his count it's been maybe five minutes, and he's not going to get very many more seconds before someone realizes something's wrong. Will slips out of the laundry room, through the rec area and back into his cell.

He shakes Hannibal's shoulder gently to wake him up. "Hey," he says.

Hannibal's eyes open slowly. He's disorientated, mumbling something in what Will thinks might be Japanese.

"I know you need sleep, but I need you to shut up and not argue. Just trust me." Will yanks the sheet mostly off his bunk and lets it hang down like a curtain which is very much against the rules. He strips down to his shorts and crawls up over Hannibal.

"Will?" Hannibal says, a little slurred from the painkillers.

"Christ, I hope you can get it up right now," Will says. Hannibal's in drawstring pants and a worn-soft shirt so it's easy enough to pull his cock out without having to really undress him. "Don't move. Let me do the work." He puts as much weight as he can on Hannibal's hips, pinning them down. He makes sure Hannibal is looking at him and asks, "Yes?"

Hannibal pets at Will's head, visibly confused, but pleased. "Probably shouldn't," he says. "But yes. Toujours."

Will wants to take his time with this, but they don't have any. He sucks Hannibal's cock into his mouth, careful with his teeth. It's a lot easier when Hannibal's soft. It feels more personal, somehow. He closes his eyes and focuses, and relief crashes over him when he feels Hannibal swell and harden. Will swallows as much as he can, pushing himself until his eyes are watering, he's drooling uncontrollably and he's making the little choked, gagging sounds he knows Hannibal likes.

It happens so quickly after that. The COs start shouting, the alarm for lockdown goes off. Guards in riot gear rush into their cell, the wheelchair flung out into the main room, the sheet yanked down. Will is dragged off Hannibal and the guards scream at him to stay on the ground, handcuffing his hands behind his back. He begs them not to hurt Hannibal as they force Hannibal off the bed and onto his knees next to Will. Hannibal's breath is coming in controlled gasps and he's trying to curl around himself but he can't as they drag his hands behind his back and cuff him as well.

Crawford storms in. "Get them up," he snarls.

"You'll kill him," Will protests. "He can't stand right now, please."

Crawford hesitates at that as if reassessing the situation. Will is right. Hannibal can't get up, and if Hannibal can't get up then he didn't make the mess Will left in the laundry room.

Crawford looks at the sheet half ripped from the bed, at Will's state of undress, at the saliva on his chin he's trying to wipe on his own shoulder, at Hannibal's state of undress. One of the riot guards takes off their mask. "They were, uh," he says.

"Spit it out," Crawford says.

"Graham was blowing Lecter," the CO says uncomfortably.

Crawford looks as though he might have an aneurysm. "Are you fucking kidding me?" he says.

Will does his very best to look embarrassed. "It's been three weeks," he mumbles. "I missed him."

Hannibal slumps down, toppling over from his knees to resting on one hip, propped up between bunk and wall. He's making a horrible quiet keening sound and Will can't tell if he's putting it on or not.

"Christ," Crawford says. "Get Lecter back to the med ward, Graham you're coming with me."

Will ducks his head, lets his shoulders slump. "Please don't cancel my hearing," he says. "I know we're not supposed to..." he manages to get his eyes to tear up, "to fraternize."

The entire scene is rapidly devolving. Hannibal is set none-too-gently into the wheelchair and taken away, Will is standing in his shorts and handcuffs with a piteous expression on his face, and Crawford has a dozen riot guards circling the cell because he's looking for a murderer. Not two inmates breaking the 'no fucking' rule.

He drags Will to the laundry room. "You want to tell me what happened?"

Will looks at Crawford, looks at the scene, looks back at Crawford. "You mean like profile it?" he asks and can pinpoint the moment when Crawford buys his act.

Crawford sighs. "Yeah, Graham, sure. Why the hell not." He turns to yell at a CO, "Uncuff him, get him some god-damn pants."

"My opinion won't hold up in court but I'll see what I can do," Will says. He nods at the door as the cuffs are taken off him. "Everyone on A-block knows the lock is busted so getting in would have been easy. Just put your shoulder into it and push. Your weapon is still here, no useable shoe treads. Blood pooling indicates that the victim was on his hands and knees when the first incision was made, his killer underneath him. See how there's a void there? Andrews was pushed onto his back, still alive."

Will steps delicately around the laundry room. He understands now why killers return to the scenes of their crimes. Watching everyone mill about, seeing but not understanding, it has a sort of power.

Andrews is flat on his back where Will left him, body cavity empty, red flesh and yellow fat on display. His viscera are neatly arranged around him spelling out 'zig hiel'

"That's not how seig heil is spelled," Will points out, a little proud of that misdirection.

"No shit," Crawford says. He looks sick. All the COs do. This isn't the sort of death they're used to dealing with.

"Either way, it's a mockery. Whoever did this, probably their ideologies are conflicting. Using his guts rather than his blood is saying Andrews is gutless, he's a coward. Or it's a gang thing." Will accepts a shirt and jumpsuit from a CO. Both are far too big which suits him just fine. It's easier to look small and unassuming in too-large clothing with his bare feet peeping out from under the hem.

"There isn't any skill needed for this sort of damage," Will says. There's more blood pooling on the floor than he remembers. Surely it wasn't quite so much of a mess when he left. "It's just stab in and slice open. Anyone with a sharp knife, enough time, and half-decent arm strength could do it."

He stands next to Crawford, fixing the scene in his memory. Hannibal will want him to describe it at some point. Probably he'll be more interested in how Will felt, before, during, and after, but likely he'll want to be able to visualize the set-up. A few piles of laundry have

toppled over and are soaking up the blood. A very small part of Will is wondering what went so wrong that he ended up here, standing over his own crime, uncaring. But he doesn't feel uncaring. Not angry, or shocky. He's just calm. He feels peaceful, and powerful, and settled in his bones in a way that feels new, but good. It feels right.

Crawford sends him away with a warning not to be hanging any more sheets.

This time Will gets Hannibal back within four hours. He still looks fatigued, but the doctors have declared him unlikely to die and none of them like him. He's useful when he's healthy, but he antagonizes the doctors and Will isn't surprised they got rid of him as fast as possible.

"What, exactly, did you do?" Hannibal asks from between clenched teeth, the second their cell door is locked. He's angry, Will can tell. Really angry.

Will sits down on the bunk. He just killed a man, premeditated murder, he disemboweled the body and made a spectacle of it. He lied. He got away with it.

"They're not going to catch me," Will says.

"You stupid little idiot," Hannibal breathes. "If they do figure you out and I'm going to have to leave you here, I'll kill you myself."

Chapter 15

Will has imagined his death at Hannibal's hands a thousand times, a thousand different ways. He can't quite put his finger on how it would happen. Hannibal is unpredictable in his methods. Apart from general torture and organ removal, he has no pattern. Will likes to think it would be a little different than all the others (sometimes Will remembers exactly how many others, but it's a little less horrifying every time, just a number, just another file in the FBI vaults) but he doesn't flatter himself that Hannibal would go out of his way.

"How would you do it?" Will says, before he can think better of it.

The silence that follows speaks volumes. If he could, Hannibal likely would have struck Will across the face. "Get off my bunk," Hannibal says. He makes the shift from the chair himself, shrugging off Will's attempts to help.

"Hannibal," Will says, feeling like he's very quickly losing control of the situation.

"I am tired," Hannibal says. "Please do me the courtesy of staying quiet."

He seems to notice, for the first time, the book still sitting on the mattress. He picks it up and turns it over in his hands and then just lets it drop onto the floor. He lies down on his back, folds his hands over his stomach, and as far as Will can tell, goes right to sleep.

Will sits down on the edge of the bunk. Hannibal doesn't bother to open his eyes. "No, William," he says.

Will stands again, awkwardly stuck between chair and bunk. He feels a little bit like he might be sick. "Hannibal," he says again, pleading.

He's being given the silent treatment, which is petty and childish, and literally the only thing Hannibal can do to him right now. So he's doing it. And it hurts more than if Hannibal had struck him.

Will sits on the floor, wrapping his arms around his knees. His stomach aches from where Andrews kicked him, he has a headache. "I asked the Latinos for the shiv. Luis said if I killed Andrews I wouldn't owe them, so I don't owe them. I waited until you came back so I'd have a plausible alibi. So I went to the laundry room, he followed me, and I killed him. I don't know what you want me to say, Hannibal. It worked. It's done. Crawford has nothing on me."

Hannibal does look at him then, with dawning horror. He struggles into a sitting position and Will jumps up to get his blankets and mattress down off his bunk and rolls them to make a cushion for Hannibal to lean back against so he can be mostly propped up. "I'm not worried about Crawford," he hisses. "I'm worried about retaliation from the Aryan Brotherhood."

Whatever drugs they gave Hannibal to get him back out of the medical ward, they're kicking in now. He falls back against the cushion Will made. His words slur at the edges, his accent is thick and heavy in his mouth. It takes him time to corral his thoughts.

"If they figure out you did it then you are in very serious trouble," Hannibal says. "I am concerned because if you're alone here, you aren't safe, and if you're alone on the outside, you aren't safe."

"I can take care of myself, Hannibal. I think I've proven that."

Hannibal sags back against the cushion of Will's mattress, the fight going out of him. "That isn't our bargain," Hannibal says and smiles at him, a little wistfully. It's startling, if not surprising, the depth of feeling in Hannibal's eyes, and the curve of his mouth. Will doesn't want to attach a name to that feeling. He doesn't trust the answer.

Hannibal sighs and beckons Will closer, tugs on his shirt so Will is leaning against the bunk, head near Hannibal's hip. He strokes the bristle of Will's hair, warm hand easing the tension knotting up his neck and back. "My darling boy," he says, like Will's not pushing forty. It sounds like he has more to say, but he just cups Will's chin in his hand and smoothes his thumb over Will's cheekbone. He says, "Before the COs came, I would cut you from throat to navel, crack open your ribs and pull your heart from its moorings. The muscle is tough, but I would swallow great pieces at a time before they could take you away from me."

It seems weirdly romantic. "Not my brain?"

"That would be preferable but it's not very safe to eat human brain. So the heart would have to be a metaphorical stand-in, as the Egyptians believed, for where your soul is housed." He's becoming hard to understand.

"What about on the outside?" Will asks.

"I don't want to kill you, William," Hannibal says plaintively. "What a terrible waste that would be."

Will takes his hand and presses a kiss to the knuckles. "I want to make a new deal," he says, but Hannibal is asleep.

Will sits on the floor next to the bunk for a while. There are bruises on Hannibal's wrists and ankles. When he lifts Hannibal's shirt up to check, Will can see another two bands of bruises across his chest and hips. Six-point restraint for a man with a seriously debilitating wound. He'd been stuck in a six-point restraint, strapped down severely enough to bruise, and drugged to the gills on painkillers because now he wasn't just Hannibal Lecter, now he was the Chesapeake Ripper. Now he was Hannibal the Cannibal and people were afraid. It's the life he's signing himself up for in exchange for Will's freedom.

Will can see it, like he's walking the halls as it happens. Hannibal's new cell, a room with a window, his own artwork on the walls to remind him of more beautiful places. Clean sheets, bleached into softness. Test, after test, after test, to see what's wrong with him. Why Hannibal Lecter is the way Hannibal Lecter is. When he causes trouble, and he always causes trouble, they will lie him down on those white sheets, put six-point restraints on him, and give him drugs to make him pliable. They won't get their answers, Will is sure of that, but they will see him brought low. And when that isn't enough, they'll connect him to electrodes and put a bit

between his teeth. And they will shock his wonderful, terrible, unique brain until nothing is left of Hannibal at all.

He wonders if that's the goal. If that's how Hannibal plans to escape. To obliterate himself.

Will doesn't want that. He doesn't want Hannibal to make that trade. He gets up from the bed and sits down at the desk, opening one of the notebooks to a fresh page. He turns in the chair to look at Hannibal, unwashed greying hair, one hand resting on his stomach, the other in the place where Will had been lying. "You better have a plan...If you're fucking with me," Will threatens, but Hannibal just continues to sleep.

Will stares at the college-ruled paper for a while and then writes out the statement he will give at Hannibal's trial.

After waiting so long for Hannibal to come back from the hospital, everything seems to happen so fast.

At first there's nothing. Investigations continue into who killed Andrews but the finger of blame is pointing far away from Will so he is content to ignore it. Hannibal is irritable and affectionate by turns, depending on where he is in his painkiller cycle and Will develops a fondness for the sleepy-eyed smiles Hannibal gives him when he's stoned: they're wide and show his crooked, sharp teeth. He murmurs things in Lithuanian and Japanese that Will doesn't understand. They play Go and Hannibal still beats him every time.

Then Will is due to appear before a judge and they'll come to get him in the afternoon. The world tilts sideways out from under him. He moves through breakfast in a daze then helps Hannibal bathe without soaking his incision and then scrubs himself down. Hannibal watches him with a clinical, assessing eye.

"I do wish your hair was a little longer," he says.

"Hey Lecter," someone without a shred of intelligence calls out, "you're at just the right height to suck my dick."

Will tries not to think about Hannibal as a child and the people who were supposed to look after him and who abused him instead. He seems remarkably unfazed by threats of sexual violence. It makes Will's stomach turn over.

"Wrecker," Will says, supplying the man's nickname, since he doesn't know his real name.

Hannibal rolls his eyes and doesn't bother turning to look. "Will, if some cretin wishes to put soft, intimate parts of himself within biting distance, I feel as though we owe it to Darwin not to intervene."

"He says he'll rip your dick off with his teeth and have a little snack." Will leans on the word 'little,' and is gratified when eavesdroppers laugh.

"Take me back to the cell," Hannibal says imperiously, "I've picked up a new razor from the commissary and you're not going in front of a judge with that sad fluff on your face."

Will doesn't bother to take offense. His beard is perfectly respectable. Hannibal just likes to boss him around. As Will settles himself on the floor of their cell so Hannibal can reach him without taxing his stomach muscles and tilts his head back he wonders about his own sanity. Of the two of them, one of them is a serial killing cannibal, and the other is the idiot letting the serial killer put a blade to his throat. Will figures he's probably the one who should wind up in the loony bin.

Hannibal's hands are warm and steady. The razor is a piece of shit, but he has a delicacy of touch that helps ease the burn. Will closes his eyes and lets everything flow away from him. He imagines letting Hannibal do this for him somewhere that isn't a cell, with something that isn't a disposable plastic, dual-blade, bic. A straight-razor. He bets Hannibal knows how to use a straight-razor. The idea of Hannibal putting a blade so close to his throat isn't frightening, it's arousing. Somewhere in the sunlight, maybe that same imaginary place where Hannibal pictured the bed with expensive sheets.

They're almost done when Hannibal nicks him with the blade.

"Sadist," Will mutters, and makes an embarrassing little sound when Hannibal licks at the stinging cut.

"You look as though you're enjoying yourself," Hannibal says and presses his foot against Will's groin where he has the beginnings of an erection. "What were you thinking about?"

Will wants to tell him, but what comes out of his mouth is, "This could be our last day together." If they decide he can be released, they'll let him go right away. He might never even *see* Hannibal again.

Hannibal draws his foot away. "It could," he says.

"Shut up," Will says in a harsh whisper. "You did this." He hunches over, grabbing a towel and wiping the remains of the soap off his face. Any arousal he had going, is gone.

He gets up and puts on the fucking nice suit that Hannibal got him. It fits like it's been tailored. He hates it. He bets he looks the best he's ever looked. The first day he came to the prison, he thought his heart was going to crawl out of his mouth. Now he feels the same way about leaving.

"Come here," Hannibal says. "Let me kiss you before you go." His hands feel rough against Will's freshly shaven cheek but his mouth is wet and soft. Will clutches at Hannibal's jumpsuit. What a fucked up mess his life is. He makes himself let go. "You look good enough to eat," Hannibal says, like the enormous prick he is.

Will shakes his head, not really negating anything. "Maybe I'll see you later," he says weakly.

Hannibal pats Will's chest. "À la prochaine," he agrees as the COs come to take Will to court.

Chapter 16

Chapter Notes

> I know nothing about the legal system. This is almost certainly not how it would work. The quote referenced is from the Homeric Hymn to Demeter.

Will is shuffled from the prison, to the bus, heading to an actual courtroom. No simple parole hearing. Katz comes with him, sitting with her feet up on an empty seat in the bus.

"Don't look so grim," she says. "You're getting out of here."

Will rests his head against the seat and watches the telephone poles rush by. The AC is on too high and he's cold. "Maybe," he says. He runs his fingers over the soft weave of his suit and thinks about the way Hannibal's jumpsuit felt against his hands. They way his skin felt.

"Try not to let the excitement overwhelm you," Katz says dryly. "Don't worry so much, there's no way you're going back there to do anything other than pick your shit up."

The suit has been carefully tailored to fit around his cast, a slight expansion panel in the sleeve to compensate for the bulk. It's nicer than any suit he's ever bought for himself. No one expects the Fed to dress like James Bond, especially not the teachers. He doesn't know if he can bear to stand in front of a class again, even if they did want him to. He has a sneaking feeling that by the time Hannibal's trial is over, the odds of anyone remembering Will was in prison seem low. He'll be the man who brought the Chesapeake Ripper in.

But there's nothing actually waiting for him. There's nothing left of his old life, it was all dismantled and stripped away the second they put the cuffs on him. Now all he has is A-block, cell seventy-three, his routine, and the man it all revolved around.

His mouth feels dry and it's hard to swallow. "I don't have anything."

Katz says, "Your wallet? Wedding ring?" She's fishing, but he doesn't mind. It's better than talking about how much he's not going back to.

"Not married," he says. He hadn't thought about it. Where his wallet, his house keys, all the remnants of his old life, ended up. Brauer will know, he thinks. His trial was short, he has money to get by for a long time. His monograph royalties have been steadily accumulating in his absence. In theory, he doesn't have to go back to work. What is he going to do though, if he doesn't work?

Maybe they'll let him go back to the labs. That was nice. Quiet. Simple.

He's said goodbye to Zee, just in case. Said goodbye to Price, and Mallori, and Hart. Even Duct Tape and Bareback and all those guys. Now they're gone. It's all gone. A year of his life is just...over. He has nothing to show for it but a few new scars and another murder on his head.

"Single huh?" Katz grins at him. "So...what are you doing after court?" She doesn't mean it so he musters up a smile and hopes it doesn't look as terrible as it feels. He can't quite think of anything to say though, but she lets him be the rest of the way to the courthouse. She's good people.

The judge's chambers are all dark wood and bookshelves but the windows open so at least there's sunshine coming in. It smells like leather. Brauer is already waiting there, briefcase by a chair, beaming at them.

"Looking good, Graham," he says. "There's that baby face I knew was under there. Doesn't he look better officer Katz?"

Katz smirks. "He looks like high-class arm candy."

Will can feel his face heating up. "Well thank god I'm tricking my way out of this," he mutters. "Otherwise I'd have to rely on the law."

"You're funny," Katz says, a bit of surprise in her voice. No one's ever said that about him before, and not meant it as an insult. She gives him an appraising look. It's worrying. Last time he saw that look on her face it was just she busted up a major drug supply running through the Black inmates. Four guys in the SCU. Two guys sent to supermax. She's smart, she's observant, and she's tough as nails.

The door to the chambers opens and the judge comes in. E. Cheung according to the name on her desk. She's a short, heavy-set woman with grey hair the colour of steel and a stern expression. The judge watches Katz remove Will's handcuffs with a raised eyebrow. "That doesn't look as though it was very secure," she remarks.

Will sits in his appointed chair. "It's not," he says, pulling the sleeve back a little so she can see his cast. "But I'm not a flight or fight risk." If he doesn't look at Katz, he doesn't have to see her try to school her expression. She knows he's a fight risk but she won't say anything.

"Fighting, fleeing, feeding and fucking," Cheung says, taking a seat. "Those are the four biological imperatives that we must have to survive as a species. Hannibal Lecter is going on trial for cannibalism, amongst other things. It seems to me he has an appetite not easily sated. What does that leave you with and how concerned do I need to be?"

"This isn't about Hannibal," Brauer says, smoothly cutting in.

"Of course it is," Cheung says. "Do you know why I'm here? Because I'm the only judge who hasn't had dinner at his house, and that's because I moved here very shortly before he was arrested. I'd met him, of course." She waves a dismissive hand. "He was probably the only person at that party who didn't try to schmooze with me. He just made small talk but a bit of old world charm goes a long way. I asked why he hadn't brought a date. I asked because a

man like him is either a grieving widower or there's something very wrong with him. With a man like that, you just hope he isn't hurting someone."

"The dark triad," Will says. "Narcissism, Machiavellianism and psychopathy."

Cheung inclines her head in agreement. "I can always spot them. A lot of high-flying men are sociopaths."

"What did he say?" Will wants to know that Hannibal, the one who went to dinner parties with important people, who made his own beer - the pretentious fuck - and who made small talk with high court judges.

"That his date was unavailable." She shrugs. "He was seeing some doctor at the time. She'd been called to consult on something or other. I was reassured. I was fooled. His performance of normalcy was flawless."

It had to have been Alana Bloom. "I wouldn't know," Will says. "He never tried to be anything but himself with me. He was always something terrible, I just had to figure out what."

Cheung puts reading glasses on her nose and looks over them at Will. "Hannibal Lecter is a lot of things, and one of those is the reason you are here. He hired your lawyer, he is setting you up to testify against him, and I know he bought you that suit. It practically has his name written all over it. According to several corrections officers, you two were in an intimate relationship. We know what sort of man he is. What sort of man are you? What game are you two playing, Mr. Graham?"

"Your honour," Brauer says and she quells him with a look.

"I am speaking to Mr. Graham," she says.

Will takes a deep breath. "It's not a game. Not to me. We were assigned as cellmates without design or purpose. I was attacked my first week. He fought the guy off and...ate his tongue." Cheung remains impassive. Will imagines she's heard worse. "He protected me," he says.

"And what did you have to do in return?"

"I'm his," Will says, because that's the only way he can think of to describe their situation. "That was the bargain." He feels manic, like he's going to fly out of the chair, like he's going to burst out of his own skin. "Hannibal's not as clever as he thinks he is, your honour. I was a profiler for a living. It was my job to understand people like him, and I used that. I was able to manage him. He's infatuated and obsessed with my perceived ability to connect with him."

"Perceived?" She's sharp. Her nails tap against the blotter on her desk. She doesn't believe him. Not yet.

"I'm empathetic, not insane," Will says. "He's a serial killer. I can understand him, but there's no connection. You don't connect with someone like Hannibal Lecter."

Cheung hums thoughtfully. "I see. I've heard from Doctor Bloom who evaluated you, and I have your medical records, and the transcripts from your previous trial. Tell me, why did you plead guilty?"

"Because I killed someone," Will says.

"And why now are you appealing?"

Will can see blue sky out of the open window. It smells like the city, street vendor hot dogs, cigarette smoke and exhaust. "The man I murdered was an armed threat but what I did was beyond self-defense. I'm not sick anymore and prison is going to make me into something terrible all over again."

"Hm, I've seen the photographs of what you did," Cheung says. "Mr. Graham, I have seen overkill, and what you did was surprisingly restrained considering what the so-called 'Dollmaker' did to all those women. I don't have any issues with overturning your verdict due to your medical state and had you come to me with that alone, I would already be signing these papers. What I need to understand is what bargain you struck with Hannibal Lecter in regards to his upcoming trial. What can of worms am I opening?"

Will remembers the final time he asked Hannibal that question. Lying together on Hannibal's bunk, maybe their last night together. He'd asked for the truth and Hannibal said, "If you would like the truth, then here it is: I am setting you free, Will Graham, because that is what you do with things you love."

Will had wanted to scream. That old familiar bubble rising in his throat. "Don't say that to me."

"Why not?" Hannibal said. "You wanted the truth."

"It isn't. You can't," Will said. "We both know you can't."

Hannibal's fingers spidered over Will's face and neck like he was memorizing Will's features by touch. "You decided that on your own based on the killers you have profiled in the past. You may believe me or not, but that is the truth."

"I didn't have to strike a bargain." Will says to Cheung. "Hannibal thinks he's smarter than everyone because most of the time no one proves him wrong."

"But you're smarter?"

Will squares his shoulders. "I did what he wanted, I gave him what he wanted, and he...I told CO Crawford this, he can't love the way other people do, but what he feels for me is as close as he'll ever get. Prison was bad for me, your honour, and he liked me the way I was. He didn't want to see that destroyed. Playing god amuses him. Getting me out of there feeds his complex that he can do whatever he wants."

Cheung drums her nails on the papers in front of her. "What do you think, officer Katz?"

Everyone is surprised, especially Katz, but she rallies. She still suspects he murdered Andrews. Will holds very still, as though that will help him. For a long, horrible moment he thinks she'll say something about that and there's nothing he can do to stop her.

"He's not going to reoffend," Katz says and Will tries not to slump with relief. "Get him away from Lecter, get him out of prison, and Graham will go back to being a productive member of society. Keeping him in prison would be a mistake."

"Well then." Cheung picks up a pen, signs a few bits of paper. "Congratulations, Mr. Graham. You're free to go."

Will stays sitting. "I don't understand," he says.

Brauer pats him on the back and takes one of the papers she signed, tucking it into his briefcase. "It means your appeal worked and by this time tomorrow your record will be cleared. You're not an ex-con, Graham. You can see if the Fed will give you your job back." He seems to understand Will's genuine shock and pats him again, a little more sincerely. "Hey, Will, it's over. You're not paroled, you're free."

The next few hours pass in broken flashes. He goes through the motions as directed. Brauer has his wallet and his watch. The property in Wolf Trap sold a few months back, so Brauer takes him to a hotel and waits for him to get a room.

"You okay?" Brauer asks. He looks worried. He'd started looking worried back at the courthouse.

Will manages a nod. There are so many people milling around, so many women. Real life seems so surreal. "I'll be fine," he says, working to be convincing. Brauer's face says he's not doing a good job. "I'll be here," he amends. "We'll talk tomorrow about Hannibal's trial?"

Brauer agrees and, most importantly, Brauer goes.

Will sits in his hotel room. The television is on, the smiling faces of employees beaming out at him, wishing him a pleasant stay. There's a pool on fourteenth floor. And a gym. The bed is soft, pillows stacked up. Who the fuck needs so many pillows? Will gets up and strips off his jacket, his tie, his shoes. He unbuttons the collar of his shirt, rolls up his sleeves - and how it must have pained Hannibal to know the suit was going to have to work around his cast. He's hanging the jacket up when he realizes there's something in the pocket.

There are two pieces of paper. One is blank, to protect the jacket and prevent the pencil from smudging, the other is Hannibal's drawing of them as gods of the underworld. Hannibal, who has beautiful copperplate when he tries, and horrible chicken scratch when he doesn't, has taken the time to neatly write out on the back of the drawing:

"Go now, and feel kindly in your heart towards me: be not so exceedingly cast down; for I shall be no unfitting husband for you among the deathless gods. And while you are here, you shall rule all that lives and moves and shall have the greatest rights among the deathless gods: those who defraud you and do not appease your power with offerings, reverently performing rites and paying fit gifts, shall be punished for evermore. Yours, Hannibal Lecter"

The mini-bar is well stocked.

Will opens the first little bottle and toasts the air. "You're a fucking prick, Hannibal," he says, and starts drinking.

Chapter 17

Will wakes up with the worst hangover he's had in his life. He orders the greasiest of breakfasts via room service, throws up twice, crawls into the shower, and prays for death while he waits. Every inch of his body hurts. Blinking is too loud. Will drinks cup after cup of water until his breakfast arrives and then he eats, crawls back into bed, and goes back to sleep.

He wakes up again, around two o'clock, and feels slightly more like a human being. There's a knock on the door and Will staggers over. "Hello?" he says, opening it without bothering to check. "Wrong roo-"

A blonde woman with the second-best poker face Will's ever seen is on the other side. She's got one of those little boxes on wheels that lawyers cart around with them. Will wipes his mouth with the back of his hand and steps aside.

"I'm guessing you're Hannibal's lawyer," he says.

She's not a tall woman, even with stilettos on, but she walks in like she owns the place. She takes a seat on one of the surprisingly uncomfortable chairs next to the desk and crosses her legs like a statement. "Bedelia Du Maurier," she says. She has a low voice and she speaks quietly. Will has to listen carefully to catch what she's saying. "Hannibal's told me so much about you."

She's good, but she's not quite at Hannibal's level and he can tell she's comparing whatever Hannibal said to his current appearance and he has fallen far short of her expectations. There's a tray of congealing, left-over eggs, mini bottles of booze strewn everywhere, Will is in his underwear. It's not a good look.

"I bet he has," Will says. He gets a robe out of the bathroom and ties it around himself. The only thing he has right now is his suit. "What can I do for you?"

Bedelia flicks open the catches on her little luggage box and begins removing files. "We have a great deal to talk about. To begin with, you have co-ownership of all his properties and accounts in America."

"What?"

She casts a look at the chair next to hers. Will takes the hint and takes a seat. Bedelia slides several pieces of paper across the desk. "There's something you need to understand Mr. Graham, and that is that Hannibal is extremely wealthy. You are now extremely wealthy."

"I don't want his money," Will says.

Bedelia's eyebrows lift fractionally. Whatever she expected of him, it wasn't this. Maybe she imagined someone looking for an easy way out. Although dealing with Hannibal was never going to be anything anyone considered easy.

Bedelia says, "Nevertheless, this is all the information you will need to access his bank accounts, the keys to the house here in Baltimore, and to his car. The house is somewhat in disarray since the FBI combed through it for evidence, but almost everything except the kitchen and the cellar have been left for you. As per his request a cleaning service has aired it out and stocked the fridge."

Will needs coffee. Water. Something. His stomach flips over unhappily and bile rises in his throat. He chokes it back. "I don't want to live in his house," Will says.

Bedelia has the same uncanny stillness as Hannibal does. Will misses him with a fierceness that surprises even him. Something must show on his face. What he wants, he can't have.

Her expression softens fractionally. "Let him give you this," she says. "I imagine you deserve it after being his cellmate."

There's no way to argue with her, Will wouldn't even know where to start trying. He listens numbly and then when she's gone, he takes a plastic bag, puts all the papers in it, goes to the nearest WalMart and buys himself jeans and a few t-shirts, socks, underwear, and uses his own damn credit card to pay for it. Then he goes and finds Hannibal's house.

It's in a nice neighbourhood and he can feel eyes on him as he walks up to the front door. With the FBI in and out, news crews probably circling, he's just another body in a parade of strangers in and out of their street. He's not surprised the neighbours want to peek at him.

Will realizes he hasn't looked at a newspaper. Hasn't checked to see what the internet is saying about the capture of the Chesapeake Ripper. He doesn't want to know. Will just prays there isn't anything about him yet.

When he steps inside Hannibal's house the smell washes over him. The same smell cold crime scenes have, after the blood's been cleared away and the body long gone. Empty. Ransacked. Will feels like he's disturbing a tomb.

There's a letter with his name on it, waiting for him on the table in the foyer. Of course Hannibal's house has a room that could be described as a foyer, Will thinks. He drops the shopping bag that contains pretty much everything he owns onto the floor and opens the letter.

Dearest Will,

You are free; declared to be without guilt. By your own admission. By the word of the law. I hope with all my heart that you will not linger in the shadow of prison. You know I care nothing for what the world has to say about morality, desperate animals bleating to a god they are so sure is good. We know better. What is goodness, or mercy? We know these are creations of man's making. Guilt is the punishment we devise for ourselves. Do not punish yourself, Will. You are a creature that is utterly unique, and that is the holiest of holies. Creation, destruction, understanding - is this not godly? To see something utterly in its ugliness and beauty, to know its mind, and hold in your hand the choice to be benevolent or cruel.

"Jesus, Hannibal," he says, "your god complex is showing."

I think sometimes you showed me mercy even when I gave none in return. I understand you, Will Graham, as you understand me, and that is not something I ever dared to hope for. They have me in segregation, for my own safety they tell me, and I will occupy my time with thoughts of you, imagining the moment you set blade to belly. How I wish I could have seen your face, but there are many things I will never see.

I shall never see this house again, of that I am sure. I am not a sentimental man so what you do with it is entirely up to you. You should be in possession of an itemized list of the artwork and antiques I own, and their appraised price, as well as a number of reputable auction houses, should you decide to sell. A few places on the wall are already empty, as I donated some pieces to the local museum. Although, I doubt you will mind, will you?

Will snorts and wanders through the foyer into what he wants to call a parlour. Hannibal, Will decides, has some weird taste in decor. How no one saw his house and didn't think 'serial killer' Will doesn't know.

You will notice that this house has a hidden cellar. No doubt the FBI have taken what was down there but you may not wish to investigate for yourself. I leave that decision to you; you know what I am. Regretfully, the kitchen has been ransacked in the search for evidence. I never asked, do you cook, or do you subside on meals to go, and fast food? Either way, the fridge is stocked. You lack vitamin D in your diet, get more sun.

"Fuck you, more vitamin D," Will mutters and goes into the kitchen.

It's been trashed by the FBI, but out of all the rooms in the house he's seen so far, this one speaks to him the most. He can see Hannibal there. Moving from sink to counter, cutting herbs now dead in their pots. He stands there for a moment, watching Hannibal with his mind's eye, and then moves on. There's an open door that leads to a secondary food preparation area - this more suited to someone who butchers their own meat, and an amazing amount of wine.

There's a trap door in the floor sitting open.

Here too, he can see Hannibal: calmly emerging from whatever he had down there, put together. Not a killer in the moment, but the calm, smooth veneer that came afterwards. Will turns and leaves the room. Later, he decides, he will do that later, when everything else has been taken care of.

Dining room, study, bathroom - Will goes up the stairs and pokes around until he finds Hannibal's bedroom. Alana Bloom was right. Those are some interesting suits. The room still smells like Hannibal. Will lies on the bed, head where Hannibal's used to lie, in another life and finishes the letter.

I would ask a favour - there is a suit of samurai armour outside the bedroom, it belonged to the ancestors of my aunt who was one of the very few people in life I could not bear to lose, and I would hate to see it disappear into some auction house. Please, if you keep nothing else, keep that.

Never hesitate to call Bedelia Du Maurier and request her help. She has my instructions to assist you in any way she can. This is not ideal, I know. Letters, and court dates, and property you likely don't want. I'm sure you have many choice words to say, but I hold you to our bargain: I protect you, you do what I say. So do as I say, allow me to take care of you, and take what I am giving you.

More than anything else, I desire to see you as a free man, to understand the new turns of your mind when you are free from the restrictions and routines of prison. I wonder sometimes how things might have been if we had met under different circumstances, but who can say? Imagine me as I was in these spaces, remember me as you know me. We will see each other soon and I shall think of you every day we are apart.

Yours,
Hannibal

Will folds the letter back up and stares at the ceiling. Eventually, he gets up, finds a landline, picks up the phone and calls Bedelia.

"Sell everything on his list," Will says. "All the art, the antiques, whatever. He said you could handle it. Find a real estate agent who can sell the house previously owned by the Chesapeake Ripper. Some sicko will get a kick out of it."

"If you're sure," Bedelia says.

Will looks around himself, at the wilted flowers in beautiful vases. At the animal skulls and horns on the walls and tables. At his own pale, pinched reflection in an ornate mirror. "I'm sure," he says.

Will hangs up and goes to the trap door. He doesn't have to look. He could turn around, leave the house, and never come back. Then again, he entered into this deal with his own personal devil with his eyes wide open. He knew what Hannibal was and he still slept in his bed, kissed his mouth, and killed a man to protect him. Will decides that no matter what else he is, he is not a coward.

The basement is mostly empty. There are smudges of fingerprint powder here and there, a place where a freezer once sat. If there were instruments of torture, they are gone now but Hannibal is a creative man, he wouldn't need very many instruments to hurt someone. Will's footsteps echo oddly; the rooms are soundproofed, he'd lay money on that. It's not a very interesting room, as it sits. He's seen gruesome scenes lifted from horror movies. Torture dungeons, bodies stacked like cordwood in crawl spaces, remains rotting under floorboards. One of the lab techs he used to work with liked to watch Dexter - A very neat monster, she'd said, often complaining about the real life messes they had to deal with. That's what Hannibal is, Will thinks. The Ripper staged his scenes all over the city. But Hannibal is a very neat monster.

It's nothing he didn't already know.

He feels a weight lift off him, like somehow, seeing what Hannibal did, where he did it, the places he used to be, would make everything untenable. He would no longer be able to see all

of Hannibal's facets, just the Ripper.

Will's seen some of the worst things that people can do to one another. He's not even that bothered any more by the cannibalism. You killed someone, might as well make use of the body. He doubts Hannibal's reasons are so practical. For all his denials, there's pathology in there somewhere. Hannibal still uses his teeth as a weapon when he fights, eats tongues and throats like he can carry his trophies in the very cells of his body. You don't do that unless you've got a pathology. A shiv, as it turns out, is probably more effective than biting.

He leaves the basement, closing the trap door behind him.

Will rents an apartment within a half hour walk from the courthouse and hires a few local kids to help him move some of Hannibal's furniture from one place to the other. He has to start all over again, he might as well not have to spend his first month of freedom wandering around a Bed Bath and Beyond. He moves Hannibal's bed. He shifts Hannibal's linens, towels, pillows, a few chairs, a desk, lamps, his insane collection of wines. He goes to the corner store and buys plastic picnic plates and cutlery to eat from and then does nothing but order takeaway.

The armour he puts in his bedroom. It looms ominously over him at night, but then, so did Hannibal sometimes. He doesn't sleep well anyway.

Piece by piece the house is emptied. Day by day the trial dates creep closer. Will feels like his life is on hold, even though he knows what the outcome will be. If Hannibal is declared insane, he will be moved to the BSHCI. If not, he will move to a maximum security prison. Either way, Will is going to be alone. He drinks Hannibal's wine and tries not to think about it.

Chapter 18

Hannibal's trial is a mess of sensationalist journalism and Will wants nothing to do with it, which is unfortunate because he's the star witness for the defense. Bedelia and the other lawyer - Chilton - keep trying to sit him down so they can discuss his testimony, but he dodges them fairly effectively. He'll testify. Whatever they do with what he says is their problem. These aren't his monkeys and this isn't his circus.

The first day of the trial Will takes a seat behind the defense, slightly to the left, and waits. Bedelia stalks in, stern and beautiful, a junior lawyer trailing after her with an expression that looks a lot like worshipful awe on his face. Will can see why. She's taking on a client that could make her career or destroy it. She's taking a gamble but it's not because she's that sort of lawyer, but because Hannibal's been her client from the very beginning of both their careers and she won't abandon him. They're an odd pair, Will and Bedelia, loyal despite what they know, and she gives him a tight-lipped smile as she takes a seat. He wonders how much of the monster she's seen, and how much she cares. She doesn't strike him as the type to frighten easily. Will's glad she's on their side.

The gallery fills up with the usual assortment of journalists and lookie-loos and then a guard escorts Hannibal in and Will's shoulders unknot so fast that he feels light-headed. Hannibal's in a suit similar to the others that had been in his house, three piece, plaid, well-tailored. He's also still in the wheelchair. Will knows if he could, he'd walk. Of all Hannibal's sins, pride is certainly one of them. Will wants desperately to know how Hannibal's wound is healing. How bad is it? Did someone reopen it? Whatever the case, Hannibal's not on proper pain medication. He's pale and there is a tension around his eyes and mouth deepening the lines there and making him look older.

Despite visibly being in pain, when Hannibal catches sight of Will, his face lights up in a way Will has never seen before. "Will," he says and starts to lift a hand, but he's cuffed to the chair. He pulls his mask back into place, but Will has a sense of foreboding that he might have been wrong about Hannibal in one or two very important ways.

"You didn't have to come," Hannibal says to Will, unconcerned, as though he doesn't care. "I fear it will be long, slow, and boring."

Bedelia greets Hannibal perfunctorily and both of them ignore the slightly terrified junior lawyer. Will makes sure he is sitting behind Hannibal, just to his left, so Hannibal can see him if he turns in his chair, and he can see Hannibal's profile. Hannibal does turn, not a lot, but enough. He's trying to remain impassive but his expression keeps softening, mouth pulling up into a smile.

"You look well," Hannibal says and his fingers twitch as though he longs to touch Will.

"You look like shit," Will says bluntly. "What the fuck are they doing to you in there?"

Hannibal sighs as though Will's language is a physical pain. "I chose to forgo my medicine so I would be lucid for court. Nothing more sinister than that. And I have missed you."

Then Cheung is entering, everyone is rising - except Hannibal - and the court is called to order.

"You're not a goddamn fairytale princess wasting away," Will whispers. "Don't try to sell me a line."

Hannibal's pale eyebrows go up. "Prison is not ideal for convalescence," he says. "I developed a mild infection. I'm on antibiotics now."

"Mister Lecter," Cheung snaps, "I will have silence. Don't aggravate me before we've even begun."

Bedelia looks like she'd enjoy smacking Hannibal over the back of the head when he doesn't immediately turn around. For a long moment he just stares at Will before facing front again. Bedelia glares at Will and then gives her full attention to start of the proceedings. Hannibal pleads guilty but insane, and Will cringes a little. It's so hard to prove. It's so rare that a jury accepts an insanity plea.

Will doesn't bother to listen to the opening statements. Evidence is produced, mostly evidence of his work as the Ripper, the list of names he provided, and a list of his degrees, work as a surgeon, work as a shrink, and general ability to function as a human being. Will isn't interested in that. He sits and watches the small movements of Hannibal's face as his life is held up in numbered plastic baggies and displayed to a jury of people Will highly doubts Hannibal thinks of as his peers.

It goes on like this. Will watches Hannibal, the jury, the lawyers, the judge watch Hannibal. Hannibal watches Will. Until finally Hannibal takes the stand. First witness for the prosecution. Apparently Chilton thinks Hannibal will put the rope around his own neck.

"Are you the Chesapeake Ripper?" he asks.

Hannibal sits, calm and implacable at the front of the court. The journalists hang on his every word, waiting to hear from the most notorious serial killer of the decade. There is a veneer on Hannibal's human mask that Will hasn't seen before. He looks pleasant, mild even. Will's skin crawls. "Yes," Hannibal says, in an equally neutral tone.

"And you committed the other murders on this list - exhibit A?"

"Yes," Hannibal says. "I'm willing to provide details if you doubt me."

Chilton smiles thinly. "No thank you, this is simply to establish that there is no question that you are guilty of murder."

Hannibal folds his hands over his stomach, more relaxed than protective. "And desecration of a corpse, since cannibalism isn't actually against any federal law," Hannibal says, "but I believe that would cover it. Torture. Unlawful imprisonment. Assault with a deadly weapon. I don't have the complete list, but yes."

"You are aware that what you did is a crime?" Chilton says.

"Yes."

"You are aware that what you did was wrong?"

"By whose standards?" Hannibal asks, in the same placid tone. He looks totally, utterly, terrifyingly sane.

Chilton presses on, ignoring that non-answer. "You are both a surgeon and a psychiatrist, so tell me, if you lay on your own couch, would you judge yourself insane?"

"No," Hannibal says and Will wants to throttle him. "Insane men are driven by forces beyond their control. Insanity, as you put it, comes as many forms of mental illness which distort reality. I see clearly, I control my actions."

Chilton makes exaggerated eye contact with the jury. "So by your own admission, you aren't insane?"

Hannibal purses his lips. It's a convoluted question. "What I said," he says, "is that I don't perceive myself as insane."

"So are you," Chilton says, "or are you not? You're an esteemed psychiatrist, can't you tell?"

"I have been advised by my lawyer that my close relationship with the subject might cloud my judgement," Hannibal says with a shrug. There are a few titters in the crowd. He doesn't smile but fine creases appear at the corner of Hannibal's eyes. Will can see them. Hannibal's so damned sure of himself and all Will can think of is the death penalty they'll give him if he falters.

Chilton asks him about his relationships. To his patients, to his colleagues, to his friends.

"To whom do you refer?" Hannibal asks. "There were many people who would have considered me a friend, but there are precious few for whom I would say the same. Fewer, now that I'm here."

"Would you care to list those friends?" Chilton asks.

"I am not so bold as to say they are mine, only that I am theirs," Hannibal says. "Doctor Alana Bloom, my estimable lawyer Bedelia Du Maurier, William Graham. The rest are merely acquaintances. There have been others, people I knew as a young man, but we have lost touch over the years."

"And how do you separate out friends from acquaintances?"

Hannibal smiles, a cold, ugly thing. "The same way you separate out friends from cattle. With great ease. One you would eat, one you would not."

It strikes Will for the very first time, that Hannibal's plea might succeed simply because he's out of his fucking mind.

Eventually Chilton realizes that the more Hannibal talks, the crazier he sounds, and it's Bedelia's turn to cross. She gives Hannibal what seems like an apologetic look. Will can't figure out why until she says, "How old were you when your sister was murdered?" Whatever they discussed pre-trial, Hannibal wasn't expecting that one.

"Ten," he says.

"And can you tell me what happened?"

Hannibal's jaw ticks. "We were in a remote cabin in Lithuania. Some men found us. They killed her." His voice is flat and cold.

"Why did they kill her?"

The court is silent. Hannibal is silent.

"Hannibal, please. You must answer the question." Bedelia approaches him. Her heels are muted and barely make a sound. She must have rubber soles to keep them from slipping when she paces. "I know this isn't easy for you to talk about."

"It was a brutal winter, there was no food," Hannibal says, as if in defiance to her last statement. "They ate her. I ate her unwittingly. Shortly after I spent three years in an orphanage where I was physically, mentally, and sexually abused. Since I assume that's where you're going next."

Will can see the jury softening in sympathy for the spectre of a young boy who wasn't born a monster, but was made into one. It's not true though. It just changed the way his pathology presented. Either way, it doesn't matter.

Will can also see Hannibal's displeasure at being painted as a victim. But Will remembers Hannibal screaming in the night, how he flinched away when Will wanted to fuck him. He's a monster, true enough, but everything is scared of something. The world will know that and Hannibal hates it.

Bedelia doesn't linger. "Before your sister's murder, did you ever torture animals?"

"Not for pleasure," Hannibal says. "When I was six or seven I cut open a dog to see how it worked inside. Curiosity. I had no interest in its pain and I never did such a thing again. It was..." he drums his fingers on his knee. "Messy."

"You don't seem to have a lot of feeling about that one way or the other," Bedelia points out.

"No," Hannibal says. "The first living thing I cared for was Mischa. My sister," he clarifies. "As I said to Chilton, the people I care about are few and far between."

"Not your mother or father?"

Hannibal spreads his hands as if to say, 'what can you do?' "No," he says. "They provided for me, which I appreciated as I could not provide for myself. But I didn't love them."

It goes on like this. Hannibal's history as a baby sociopath, compounded by trauma, fed by his intelligence and growing god complex, solidified by his ability to literally get away with murder. He ate the men who ate his sister.

"I acquired a taste for it," Hannibal says, smirking. "People are pigs, why not treat them as such?"

Chilton is scribbling away at his notepad. He's in deep shit now, Will knows. Right now the jury has no qualms that Hannibal Lecter is as crazy as they come. He's going to have to pull an ace or Hannibal's going to the BSHCI and not the chair.

Will leaves the courthouse feeling relief. The headlines everywhere are about Hannibal's tragic past and Will has no idea why anyone would look at the list of his victims and think he needs sympathy. There are plenty of people who are victimized and none of them become cannibals or serial killers. They ought to be talking about the lives he's destroyed, the people snatched from the world because Hannibal decided they were rude. It is, in itself, insane. He goes back to his apartment, opens a new bottle of wine and watches the news as pretty women with very shiny hair talk about the trial of the century.

"To the sack full of rabid wolverines that is your brain, Hannibal," he says as a toast. "May it do you some good for once."

Will wakes up the next morning, still in the chair, empty bottles littering the floor around him, with a vicious red wine hangover. He's late for court and it's his turn on the stand. Will showers just long enough to wash away some of the boozy smell, swallows down antacids and chews on some mints, and gets to the courthouse just in time for Cheung to give him a seriously dirty look.

"Mr Graham," she says. "So glad you could join us."

Will takes the stand. He's sick and sweating and he would rather be anywhere else. This is a bad idea. He can feel it. It's going to end badly. He can't look at Hannibal, can't bear it. Will swears to tell the whole truth and nothing but, so help him God. He tells the court his full name for the record.

"What is your relationship to the defendant?" Chilton asks.

Will shifts uncomfortably. "I...ah," he says. "I was his...I guess the best term is prison wife?" There's a smattering of stifled laughter quickly silenced by Cheung.

"'Cellmates' would have sufficed," Chilton says dryly. "Was this relationship voluntary?"

"No," Will says, and takes a sort of perverse pleasure at the wince that he's certain only he can see on Hannibal. He's waiting for Chilton to pry, but he's content to move on which is very much not what Will wanted.

"Mr. Graham, is the defendant, Hannibal Lecter insane?"

"I'm not a doctor or a lawyer," Will says, with growing unease. "I don't know the medical or legal definition."

"Not a doctor, not with the FBI, in fact, you were cellmates with the defendant because-"

"Objection," Bedelia says. "Will Graham's record is clean."

"Tread carefully Mr. Chilton," Cheung says.

Chilton's smile is ingratiating. "Of course, your honour. You were detained pending a successful appeal. Is that correct?"

Will wants to crack his skull open like an egg. "It is."

"You were brought in on the basis that not only do you know the defendant but that you have expert knowledge that qualifies you to make a statement in regards to his sanity." Chilton's shoes are loud on the floor as he paces between Will and the jury. "So, does your work qualify you to testify to Hannibal Lecter's sanity, or does it not?"

"I was a consultant on the Ripper cases. I consulted on other-"

"That's not the question I asked," Chilton interrupts.

Will takes a steadying breath. "No, it doesn't," he says.

"Thank you, Mr. Graham," Chilton says. "Motion to dismiss the witness."

Will wonders if maybe he should have gone to a few of those meetings.

Chapter 19

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

They meet in chambers. "It's good to see you again, Mr Graham," Cheung says, dry as the desert. "I see life as a free man is treating you well."

Will is rumpled, he feels like shit, he looks like shit, and he's pretty sure his shower hasn't washed away the red wine smell. "Thanks," he says, just as dry.

"Ms Du Maurier," Cheung says, "I expect this sort of thing to be sorted out long before we get to this point."

"In all fairness," Will says. "I wouldn't answer either of their calls. So."

Cheung has the same expression Hannibal gets when he's too polite to roll his eyes. "I see."

Bedelia crosses one slim leg over the other and folds her hands. " Chilton and I can both produce psychiatrists and one will say he is sane, one will say he is not. Will Graham is not only a criminal profiler of some reputation but he also had a unique opportunity to study Hannibal Lecter. He might not be able to make a clinical diagnosis, but he can explain to the jury Hannibal's inner workings, and surely it is up to them if he is, indeed, insane or not."

Cheung pours herself some water, hesitates, then pours Will a glass as well. He takes it with gratitude. "Mr Graham, explain to me how you do what you do. It sounds like conjecture and speculation to me."

It's going to sound like witchcraft when he finishes, Will thinks. "I have more mirror neurons than most people. That means all the micro expressions, all the body language, all the invisible tells get processed in a way that allows me to..." He sighs and drinks his water. "It sounds nuts, I know, but I know how people think, I can get inside them and become them."

"You're right," Cheung says. "It does sound nuts."

"The FBI didn't think so," Bedelia points out. "His closure rate is ninety-seven percent and that ability to mirror was a major component of how his encephalitis presented."

Chilton makes a face. "By presented you mean when he butchered that man and strung him up like a marionette."

"Yes," Bedelia says.

Will ignores them and lets himself really look at Cheung. It's funny because since he started doing it to Hannibal, it's a lot easier than it used to be to move in and out. He closes his eyes and lets the pendulum swing. "I can't believe I got up early for this shit," Will says. "They expect me to put a psychic on the stands. This isn't credible. I should have taken the position in Boston. I should have gone to Lecter's for dinner. Jesus, what a nightmare." He opens his

eyes and meets Cheung's. "You graduated top of every class because you thought you had to, because you're a woman, you're not white, and you're not conventionally pretty - even though that's helped because people are stupid and think because pretty girls don't have brains and since you're Asian you must be especially smart. But you got here because you worked hard, not because you're gifted. You're married, but no one knows it yet because you're married to a woman. She's a homemaker and she always fixes your collar or fluffs your hair before you leave because you spent so much time hunched over books you forget this sort of thing."

He looks away and it breaks the spell. Chilton is staring at him with a look of avid curiosity and equally avid worry. Bedelia smiles her little secret smile and Cheung clears her throat awkwardly. "Well," Cheung says.

"Sorry," Will says.

"He's an expert witness," Bedelia says firmly.

Cheung gets up. "I'll allow it," she says and leaves. Will is fervently glad he didn't have to pull that particular trick before his own trial. No one likes it.

He gets back on the stand and there's Hannibal, watching him, with the sort of intense longing that leads people to write odes, compose ballads, commit murder. No one will ever want him as much as Hannibal does. Somewhere there's a line between love and obsession, love and possession, and Hannibal's so far beyond that line he can't even see it any more. Will scrubs a hand over his face and tries to focus.

Bedelia takes the floor. "Your expertise is linked to a medical condition you have, is that correct?"

"I have an empathy disorder," Will says. "I can see anyone's point of view, and feel it intimately. It sounds bit like mind-reading but I'm really just putting together invisible tells. And I'm trained in criminology, profiling, forensics..."

"Thank you," Bedelia says. "I'd like to establish your relationship with Hannibal Lecter a little more thoroughly. You said that you were Hannibal's prison wife and that the nature of your relationship was non-consensual. Can you elaborate on that, please?"

Will had almost forgotten about that. At least now he gets to finish what he was saying. "We were put in the same cell because he had no cellmate, not by design. Neither of us chose to be there. Initially we had a deal: Hannibal protected me, in exchange I let him abuse me. Not sexually," he amends and he can see the curve of Hannibal's mouth that says he isn't amused by the game Will is playing.

The jury is paying attention though. There is a relief, as though one sort of abuse is somehow worse than others. They look more favourably on Hannibal though. Will set up their idea of a worst case scenario and then assured them it wasn't that bad.

"He wanted to experiment on me, on my ability to see him," Will says.

"But you framed your relationship sexually," Bedelia says.

Here he's on less firm ground. Two of the jury are homophobic, one is gay, another possibly so but Will's not sure, and the rest don't care. Bedelia's taking a gamble making him spell it out for them. Will rotates his wrist in the cast, just to feel the ache. "That came later. That was voluntary."

She's addressing the jury as much as she is him. "He abused you - experimented on you - and your decision was to sleep with him?"

"By that point I understood him," Will says. "And the more I understood him, the nicer he was to me. He pushed me, but never to breaking; if my attention was focused on him, I wasn't overwhelmed by the rest of prison life. Plus, he's a great lay, which made up for some of his shittier moments."

"Mr. Graham," Cheung says in warning tones.

Hannibal looks pained. Bedelia is exchanging glances with him that speak volumes. This, she is telling him, is his own damn fault.

The homophobic jury members aren't entirely happy, but the way Will phrased it sounds like any other locker-room, male-bonding moment. It sounds like he topped. It's not totally gay if you're topping, right? Their discomfort and dislike of Will eases. They're open to what he has to say.

Bedelia presses onwards. "So by the time you were released you had a significant understanding of his mental process."

"Yes," Will says.

"Could you explain it to us?"

Will clears his throat. He can feel Hannibal watching him, but can't bring himself to look back. God, if he's wrong Hannibal's never going to forgive him.

"Everyone moves through the world making little decisions about how we interact with those around us. There are rules of society and cultural guideposts for what right and wrong are. Most of the time, Hannibal moves through the world politely and unobtrusively: He isn't racist, sexist, ageist. He doesn't have road rage, or get angry when he has to wait in line. He tips well and is polite to wait-staff. Hannibal doesn't abuse children or animals. He was an excellent surgeon who was respected by the nurses, which is rare. Hannibal Lecter follows the rules better than most of us.

"There's a word we don't have in English; Rawa-dawa. It mean, the sensation of suddenly realizing you have the opportunity do something reprehensible, and no one is there to witness it, so you know you'll get away with it. Some people take those moments to hurt their children, or exploit employees, or kick dogs, or other cruelties. Hannibal takes those opportunities to kill people and eat them.

"He knows that killing people is against the law. He knows that eating people is taboo. You're also not supposed to short-change people, or cut them off in traffic. To Hannibal, it's all the

same."

Bedelia asks, "In what way are they the same?"

"On a cosmic scale," Will says. "If nothing matters than everything matters. If God isn't real then it doesn't matter. If God is real, then he sure as shit - sorry your honour - doesn't care about the suffering of humanity, so it still doesn't matter. Hannibal put aside good and evil and placed himself at the top of the food chain."

Bedelia has an amazing poker face. She gives nothing away. "That doesn't sound insane to me," she says, laying it out for him.

Will shrugs. It's a lot for the jury to take in. A lot of talking, a lot of philosophy. He's set up the argument the prosecution is making and now he moves in for the rebuttal. "It makes sense if I say it like that. But if I phrase it differently it sounds nuts - totally crazy."

"And how would you phrase it to make him sound insane?"

"He kills and eats rude people. That's his victim pool: rude people," Will says. "He kills them without remorse or mercy. And sometimes he likes to torture them to death, pose them in ironic tableaus, and feed their remains to Baltimore's high society." He gives it a beat, lets it sink in for the jury and then says, dry as the desert, "It's all in the tone."

The jury can understand that. Hannibal Lecter eats rude people. It's clear, it's simple, it's insane. They'll remember that.

Bedelia's blink is more of a brief closing of her eyes, wishing for strength.

He makes himself look at Hannibal then and despite his low-grade irritation at Will's flippancy, Will knows he got it right because he can feel Hannibal's yearning from across the courtroom. Hannibal has been seen, he has been understood, and Will can empathize so he can't just dismiss Hannibal. Will can see Hannibal's terrifying devotion and it's deep and endless, like the pit Will feels opening up inside himself. They have this, but not for long. Will's in it now. He's killed two people, there's not really any going back from that. And soon he'll be in it alone.

"Based on your expert opinion, would you leave Hannibal in prison or transfer him to a psychiatric facility?" Bedelia asks.

Will swallows down his nerves and says, "Hannibal Lecter will do more damage to prisoners he targets than the entire penal system could. Four cell-mates before me died or had to be taken away to a mental facility. Locking people up with Hannibal could be considered cruel and unusual punishment. That, and he's talked people into committing suicide and, more pertinently, murder. It seems wise not to encourage offenders further. He should be in a specialist facility, for the safety of others."

She closes with a few details but Will's turn in front of the mob is done. After his little performance on the stand there's no escaping the journalists. They find his apartment and stake it out so Will battens down the hatches and refuses to come out at all. He orders

takeout, and has groceries delivered, and - in something of a drunken fit - smashes a hole in the television so he doesn't have to hear any more about himself, or Hannibal, or the rest of it. It's not like he's missing much. Hannibal's infection gets worse and he spends the rest of his trial in the prison medical unit on antibiotics and painkillers. There's nothing to see but a parade of people who were fooled by his act. Students, teachers, colleagues...trotted out one after the other. Will doesn't care. He stays in his apartment and waits.

The jury deliberates for three days. When they come out of seclusion, so does Will.

He sits in his usual place. This time he's wired on coffee, hands shaking. He couldn't sleep. Hannibal looks much better. He sits straighter and is able to stand when Cheung enters. Will rests his elbows on his knees and presses his hands against his closed eyes so hard he sees stars and listens to the jury speak.

Hannibal is found to be guilty but insane. He is sentenced to an absurd number of consecutive life sentences at the Baltimore State Hospital for the Criminally Insane. He will die there.

They both knew that. Will knew that. It still hits him like a fist in the guts. He can't breathe.

"Hannibal," he says, choked. It's lost in the roar of noise from the gallery. The tears of families of Hannibal's victims finally getting some answers. Reporters scavenging the remains of the dead. The opinions of those who showed up just to see.

The guard is putting Hannibal into handcuffs and he's so close, he's so very close to Will but this is it. This is the end.

Hannibal turns his face so he can see Will. Hannibal looks so terribly sad. Will has never seen him look so despondent. "À la prochaine," he says.

Will jumps the railing and grabs onto Hannibal. "You stupid fucking asshole," Will says desperately and kisses Hannibal. He can hear the snap of cellphone cameras going off and he doesn't care. "You idiot, you could have lied to me, you could have let us both rot together in that prison."

They're pulled apart seconds later. Hannibal presses his fingers to his mouth, as though to hold the feeling of Will's lips on his.

"You would have been changed," Hannibal says.

"I am changed," Will says, hopeless. "What am I supposed to do now?"

"Don't visit me," Hannibal says. "I won't see you if you do."

Will feels like all the life is draining out of him. "Hannibal," he says. "Please." He doesn't know what he's asking for. Hannibal doesn't have anything to give.

"Jusqu'à ce que nous nous reverrons, mon amour," Hannibal says, as they take him away, and then he is gone.

Will shakes off the guard holding him back and collapses down onto one of the chairs. He feels hollowed out, as though some vital part of him has been cut away.

Bedelia sits down next to him. "Go," she says. "Hannibal said you liked the water. Go live on the coast. Stare at the ocean and fix boat motors. Try not to drink too much." Bedelia puts one of her hands over his. "Will," she says, so gently. "Don't stay here. Do the smart thing, take his money, do what he wants. Live your life."

He could do that. Live out by the water, mostly alone, adopt some strays and fix boat motors. He could live off his royalties for the monographs he wrote, never mind Hannibal's money. He could put Hannibal's shit in a storage locker, live his own life, move the fuck on.

He could. He doesn't.

Two days after Hannibal's been transferred, Will puts on his suit and ties, shaves, combs his hair, and goes to the BSHCI. He is polite and makes eye contact. He asks if Hannibal will be allowed visitors at any time in the near future.

They tell him he's not on an approved visitors list.

They tell him Hannibal's primary physician doesn't think seeing Will would be good for him.

They tell him that Hannibal doesn't want to see him.

When Will wakes up the next afternoon, nursing the second-worst hangover of his life, he discovers he has booked a one way flight to Florida. Well fuck Hannibal anyway.

Chapter End Notes

I feel like I should mention that this whole thing is plotted out, I just don't know exactly how many chapters it's going to be when it's done. I have at least five more, but these things have a way of expanding. So. In case anyone was wondering. I'm not just winging it here, I do have a plan and an end. ~~And a few bonus scenes~~

Chapter 20

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Florida is muggy, buggy, and utterly unlike Baltimore. Will bums around for a while, drifting from town to town until he finally buys a house in butt-fuck nowhere, Sugarloaf Key. It's cooler by the water, air thick with salt and Will feels scrubbed clean by it, and by the sand and the scorching sun. Tourists rarely venture down so far off the beaten track and, so far as Will can tell, he'll be left alone.

It's a piece of shit house, but the property is large and it's set way back from the road. He can't see his neighbours on either side. It's not Wolf Trap remote, but it's not bad either. Although, 'house' is giving his new home a bit more credit than it's due. Will's lived in bigger apartments and it's one strong wind away from being driftwood. The house took significant damage several storms ago and the owners, an elderly couple, moved out. One of them died, one moved into a retirement home. There were two more big storms. The widow decided to sell. The fishing, he is told, is incredible.

Will has nothing better to do with his time anyway, he figures he might as well keep busy making the place habitable. Since he knows precious little about home renovation, it takes all his energy and attention. Will drinks himself unconscious at night, catches a few snatches of nightmare riddled sleep, gets up at dawn and spends the day knocking out drywall, replacing roof struts, pulling up floorboards, and he doesn't think about the fact that he's lonely. He doesn't think about the fact that he's missing a murderer, or that he's a murderer himself. He doesn't think about how much that murderer isn't missing him. He's so tired all the time that it feels a little bit like when he was sick, everything strange and warped at the edges.

He puts up screen doors and windows and doesn't really bother himself with actual doors or windows. There's no air conditioning so he needs the ocean breeze. Will makes himself Louisiana gumbo and Indian curries to combat the heat. He drinks early and often. The mosquitoes stop biting after a while. He's not sure if he's made himself too toxic for them to want or what. They've never cared much for his blood in the first place.

There's already a bed in the house, an old sagging thing with a rusty wrought-iron frame. He buys a new mattress and calls it a day. In a fit of pique he threw out Hannibal's things so he drives out to a goodwill and get sheets; they smell of mothballs until he strings a washing line between two stubby trees and airs them out. He tosses and turns at night and the bed creaks and groans with every movement.

Eventually he goes to the nearest internet cafe and buys a couch second-hand off Craigslist, a huge soft thing with the world's ugliest upholstery. Will doesn't have a computer any more. He doesn't have a television. He doesn't have a cell phone, just a landline no one has the number to. There's too much temptation to dig up things that don't need exhuming. He doesn't need to see the news. Will knows he's burying his head in the sand, but it's his head, and his stretch of beach so he figures he can do what he likes.

After he gets the couch Will doesn't sleep in the bed much. He has fewer nightmares that way.

Sometimes he dreams of hurricanes. Torrential rain and wind so strong it collapses the house around him. Everything destroyed. Everything swept away leaving nothing but clean sand behind. He dreams of great black waves, of a riptide dragging him out to sea. Will takes deep breaths and lets himself drown. He feels the burning in his lungs, and when he is about to go gratefully into that good night he jerks awake.

Other nights he runs the corridors of A-block, locked gates and guards in riot gear hemming him in. The hallways are sprayed with blood. He's looking for something and he can't find it.

He's fishing, sitting in a little leaky boat. It's sinking, so slowly he's never aware of it at first, but it's going down. He's so hopeful he'll catch something, but the only living things in the water are sharks.

He's cutting into truck-stop prostitutes. He's stalking young men and downing them. He's strangling college girls. He's stabbing poor backwoods boys in the face and genitals. He's in a house made of the trophies he's taken - photographs, jewelry, hair, clothing, fingers - sitting at a table that's dripping with blood and the plates are piled with the flesh and bones of his kills

Will dreams that he's in Hannibal's house but the interior is half what it was, half prison cell. Hannibal locks him in and goes about his day. He doesn't listen when Will screams because Will's voice is nothing but breath. Hannibal ignores him utterly, until Will is starved down to nothing.

He has fewer nightmares. Fewer, not none.

Will meets his neighbours when they come by to introduce themselves. He puts his glasses on and stares at the frame, not at their faces. He can hear Hannibal in his head, lip curled, letting him know how rude he's being. On the one side is a retirement-aged couple and their mentally handicapped adult son. On the other side is a older man with a much younger wife. If any of them recognize him they don't say anything about it.

Will makes himself a screened-in porch and buys another second-hand couch to put out on it. He sits up at night and listens to the water.

He is lonely.

On a rainy Thursday, Will drives out to the nearest place that sells guns and buys a shotgun for the alligators and crocodiles in the area. He buys a handgun because he's paranoid. It's really pouring by the time he heads home and Will almost doesn't see the sad little body by the side of the road. He stops the car and gets out, his shadow long and skinny in the beam of his headlights. The dog is some sort of pitbull mix, shivering under the meagre cover of a scrubby bush. He can see her ribs and she doesn't have a collar.

Will holds out a hand slowly and the dog's tail thumps against the wet ground. Her mouth opens in that pitbull smile, tongue lolling out. "Hey," he says, loud enough to be heard over the rain. He crouches down, shuffling closer. "Hey there pretty girl."

She flinches back when he tries to touch her but he has half a ham sandwich in his car which gets her to come closer. She snaps it up in a hot second when he offers it to her and it doesn't take much to coax her into the car and out of the rain after that. The dog stares at him hopefully as they drive home and he mentally constructs a new shopping list in his head. He'll have to pick up food that's appropriate for her.

"If you stick around I'm calling you Sadie," he says. "Just so you know."

They drip in companionable silence all over the car seats. Sadie's pitbull grin is goofy as hell and Will finds himself smiling too.

Things get a little better after that. Sadie does stick around. She never barks and doesn't like to be touched, but she follows him everywhere. He pulls the blanket off his bed and puts it on the floor for her to sleep on. One night he passes out on the couch sitting up, and when he wakes up around four in the morning she's lying next to him, fast asleep, head on his lap. She doesn't mind him petting her after that so long as she knows he's going to do it.

After Sadie there's Lou, then Beans who's pregnant.

Then there's puppies: Pickles, Millie, Ned, and Gene.

The house isn't so quiet any more. It's bearable.

He finds out about the added bonus of his little pack when a reporter manages to track him down. The pack is fiercely loyal and when they realize how much Will doesn't want to talk to the interloper, they run him off the property. Beans nearly takes a chunk out of the man's leg but he's fast and she just gets a bit of his trouser leg. Once the car is gone they trot back, very proud of themselves. Beans deposits the scrap of fabric at his feet. Will knows he shouldn't, but he praises them all extravagantly and gives them all treats. The second time someone steps onto his property the dogs go after them. Unfortunately, it's one of his neighbours and Will calls the pack to heel just in time.

Will takes the hint. He introduces the dogs to his neighbours; all the local kids. He puts signs up on his property. Warning: Guard Dogs. No Trespassing. Trespassers will be shot. That sort of backwoods nonsense. He feels like he should be hoarding tins of food and preparing for the New World Order.

A year passes. Will's skin has a permanent tan and his hair has lightened in the sun. He's whipcord lean and his hands are thick with calluses. His dreams settle. He still drinks too much, but not quite so much.

When the house is mostly done, Will starts fixing boat motors again. First for his neighbours, then for their other locals, and soon enough he has a steady flow of people needing repairs. The tourists pay him in cash, the locals usually trade for it. One day, sitting on someone else's dock, drinking a beer and playing poker, Will realizes that he has drinking buddies now. They're a handful of laconic fishermen who like to sit together and not talk. It suits him down to the ground.

He grows a beard. He shaves it off. He grows it again.

An alligator tries to eat Millie and Lou, and Will puts three rounds it in before it stops moving. He calls up one of his new friends and gets lessons in how to skin and cook a gator. Feeling morbid, he makes wind chimes out of the bones and listens to them rattle at night when he sits on the porch.

It's been one year, three months, and fifteen days since he last saw Hannibal.

He dreams of Hannibal still and the dreams are full of resentment and bitterness. Will was only in prison for about a year. He's lived in Sugarloaf for just as long and he had a life before that. The time he spent with Hannibal is a fraction of his life, just a tiny fraction, but Will can't let it go. He's taken two lives - both in what could be considered self-defense. Both men he killed were bad people. But there was still mutilation and display. He still took pleasure in their deaths. And he wants to blame some of that on Hannibal. He ignores the voice in the back of his head telling him that's cowardly.

He thinks about staring into abysses, and fighting monsters, and wonders what, exactly, Nietzche would have had to say about fucking monsters.

Whoever fucks monsters should see to it that in the process he does not become a monster. Doesn't quite have the same ring to it.

When he feels like being fair - which isn't often - Will wonders how much darkness there was in him from the beginning. What if he had become a vet, or a kindergarten teacher. What if he had surrounded himself with something other than death. But he didn't. He chose not to. He chose to fight monsters instead because he was good at it, and because it felt like he was doing the right thing. After so many years of putting on the skins of the people he was hunting, after dining at their tables and sleeping in their beds...Maybe it's his empathy. Maybe it's a recognition of something that's inside him too. Who knows. All he knows is that he misses Hannibal.

Will reminds himself Hannibal is cruel and without remorse. He is selfish, he is manipulative. Will wonders how he could have let himself get played so hard and hates himself for missing Hannibal.

It's one of those contemplative nights that usually end with Will hungover and sore-headed the next morning, when the dogs all start barking, crowding up to the front door. Not as far into his cups as he would like to be, Will drags himself to his feet with a groan.

"Yeah, yeah," he says. "Hang on." Will is expecting one of his neighbours, too drunk to think about the fact that the dogs don't bark like that when it's someone they know. "Hey," he says, opening the door.

It's not one of his neighbours.

A blade flashes in the light spilling from the doorway and Will stumbles back, fast enough to prevent his throat from being cut open, not fast enough to get back inside. The guy trying to kill him is big. Will can see the prison tattoos visible on his forearms.

Hannibal was right, Will thinks, as the man grabs his shirt and drags him out of the house. He should have worried about the Aryans. He didn't think they'd come after him on the outside.

He's thrown down onto the sand and takes a steel-toed boot to the stomach. Will hears a yelp as one of the dogs tries to protect him and gets kicked as well. There's a tearing sound, another yelp and his door slams. He can hear the dogs barking, claws scrabbling at the door. At least one of them is whining in pain.

Will's breath comes back to him, he can uncurl. He rolls just before the boot stamps down where his head had been. Will comes up swinging, blind fury rising in him. He blocks the knife with his forearm and feels it skid off bone.

He punches the Aryan in the face with his other hand, both of them staggering apart. The man's between him and his house, between him and his guns. Will turns and bolts. He hears cursing as he skids around the side of the house, crashing through the screen door on the porch and the back door. The Aryan catches him by the hair before he can get to either of his guns.

Will twists and struggles, feeling hair rip loose. He avoids having his throat cut, again, but the knife carves through his face, down his left cheek, narrowly missing his nose, slicing through his top lip. The dogs rush his attacker, biting the arm holding the knife, trying to get to his throat.

His face is white hot agony but Will crawls away trying not to listen to the pained yelping of the dogs as the Aryan fights them off. He gets his hands on the shotgun. It's so stupid to keep a loaded gun in the house, but he figured he'd rather run the risk of drunkenly shooting himself than losing one of his dogs to an alligator. He's having trouble closing his right hand so he pumps it with one hand in a sharp up and down motion and slings it under his left armpit, using his right arm to balance the barrel.

He can't whistle but he says, "Heel! Come!" and the dogs back off, growling.

The shotgun kicks like a mule, the muzzle sears a burn over the cut on his arm. It blows the man's knee into smithereens.

"Someone's gonna hear that you stupid fuck," the man snarls.

"Yeah," Will says, watching him try to get up. Will's words are slurred around the damage to his face. It doesn't hurt any more. Shock probably. "But there are alligators around. Can't be too careful."

He calls the dogs over - Lou, Millie, Ned, Pickles have blood on their faces but none of it is theirs. Pickles is limping a bit, but nothing too bad.

Beans, Gene, and Sadie don't come right away.

"Fuck you," Will says. "Fucking piece of shit." He gets up. Gene is on his feet, but he's walking funny and he doesn't seem to know what's going on. Probably the one that got kicked in the face then. Then he sees Beans. Beans is bleeding from a shallow cut on her side, but

she's crouched over Sadie, whining. Sadie looks up when Will limps over. She's bleeding too, pretty heavily. But it's a flesh wound, not something life-threatening. Will feels relief crash over him.

He raises the gun again. "Put the fucking knife down," he says.

The Aryan tosses it to Will, curled around his leg. Will picks it up. It's a nice knife. It would be nicer if it didn't have a swastika carved into the handle.

"They tell you who I am before they sent you to kill me?" Will asks and only gets cursing in return. "I guess not."

He's not sure who he is. The man who made his living thinking about killing people. The man who's actually killed people. The man who survived the Chesapeake Ripper.

"I guess it doesn't matter anyway," Will says. He puts the gun down, out of reach, and walks towards the Aryan.

He tries to lunge at Will, but Will kicks him in the shattered knee and he howls in pain, crumpling in on himself.

Will pulls his head back by the hair and cuts his throat.

Chapter End Notes

I should also mention that I don't really reply to comments because I never know what to say, not because I'm a big jerk. I appreciate every single one of your comments, every single French correction (I'll get to fixing it all eventually but first to finish!), every single kudos. Each one makes me grin like a total goof and really makes my day. Probably I'll respond to all comments on the last chapter because to do otherwise would be rude :)

Chapter 21

There's a body in his house. Another man dead by his hand.

Will lets the knife fall to the ground beside the corpse. This is the first time he's had to deal with clean-up and the whole process seems so daunting. He wishes Hannibal was there. If anyone knows how to clean up a crime scene it's probably him. Will considers what he knows of forensic counter-measures and decides he can manage okay. It's very likely no one is going to examine his house. He might not have firsthand experience with clean-up, but he knows just about everything there is about not looking guilty and what professionals look for.

First things first. Will wraps his arm as tightly as possible. It doesn't really hurt, but that's probably because the cut is deep. Worryingly deep. But there's a dead man on his floor and that has to be dealt with.

He feels remarkably calm about the whole thing. It's shock, he knows it's shock, but it doesn't feel like it. It feels like the natural progression of his life. Of course the Aryans came to kill him here. There's no safety in his life, there never has been. He's spent too long fighting monsters for that. They'll just keep showing up at his door to drag out the one inside of him. And the one monster he wants, he'll never see again.

Will stumbles into the kitchen and picks up a hand towel. He starts trying to mop up the blood. By standing behind the Aryan, Will managed to avoid most of the arterial spray, but It's all up the wall and all over his couch. He strips off the couch cover before the blood can seep through and uses it to help clean the wall and floor. He's making an unholy mess of it, smearing it around rather than cleaning it.

"I just finished the fucking walls five months ago," Will says to the body, rooting around under his sink until he finds more cloths and a spray bottle which he fills with bleach. The dogs are licking up the blood pooled around the corpse. He thinks about yelling at them but it probably can't hurt them and the less blood he has to wipe away, the better.

Eventually the wall stinks of bleach and has some very suspicious damp spots, but is relatively clean. Pickles comes over to investigate but sneezes and goes back to the body which is still leaking all over his floor.

Will has a shovel and no neighbours. He staggers out back and starts digging. Blood drips off his face and onto the turned earth. The sand is dry and keeps sliding back into the hole. Will is exhausted by the time he gets about three feet down, and he can feel tears of frustration welling up. He just wants to sleep. He stops once he's reached three feet and goes back inside. It doesn't have to be pretty, it just has to work. He knows he should dig deeper but with one arm out of commission, it's too hard to keep going.

He has a knife. He has many knives. Will cuts the clothing off the body. He puts those into the hole along with the bloody clothes, couch cover, and the knife that the man brought to kill him with, douses everything with gasoline and strikes a match. While the evidence burns away, Will goes back inside and stares down at the man he's killed. It's just another crime

scene. He doesn't feel remorse. He pours himself a whiskey and sits for a while, waiting to see if he's going to start caring. It's hard to drink with his face sliced open to the bone, but if he tips his head back and pours the whiskey straight down his throat he can manage it.

He doesn't start caring. His face is numb. His arm is numb. He is numb.

It's not so hard to butcher a human. He's done it to deer before. This isn't so different. It's easier than butchering an alligator. Will wraps the meat in freezer bags and puts them away. The rest of the body, the parts he can't figure out, go into the hole and he feeds the fire with more gasoline. He sits out on his porch to keep an eye on the blaze and drinks more whiskey. His face is badly swollen now and he dry swallows a few more Percocet than he probably should.

He sleeps in snatches, dreaming of Hannibal in the prison showers that very first time, until he realizes that the shower is pouring blood, not water. He wakes up, drowning, and coughs up his own blood onto the porch. The coughing turns to dry heaving and then he's vomiting up blood diluted with whiskey. Flies buzz around him like he's already dead.

It's late, or very early, when the fire finally dies down to smouldering coals and charred bone. He gets a hammer, smashes the bones into pieces, buries the whole mess, and goes back inside.

Will looks around his house. He has still killed a man. He has steaks made of human flesh sitting in his freezer. His face hurts like it's on fire. Will can barely see and he thinks he might have a fever. The dogs mill about his legs, whining their distress. He probably has a fever. Sitting out all night with two serious wounds was probably a bad idea. He has no idea how much blood he's lost, but his shirt is soaked.

He still has to clean the floor.

The dogs have actually licked up most of the blood. Will drags their bedding over and puts it on top of the stain. It'll do for now. Will calls 911 and tells them he's cut himself pretty badly and he needs an ambulance. The dogs free-feed so he fills up as many bowls as he can, empties the rest of the emergency kibble onto the floor, and fills the bathtub with water for them to drink, then all the pots and pans. If he's gone for more than a few days he'll have to call someone to give them water. It's going to jack up his utilities bill something chronic, but Will decides to leave the tap on in the tub, just enough so the water won't evaporate entirely. It'll buy him a few more days. Will leaves the back door open for the dogs. There's nothing worth stealing, and with all his signs, he doubts anyone will bother the property.

He walks out to the road and realizes he's leaving a trail of blood behind him, dripping steadily from his face and through the bandage on his arm. It's soaked through. He doesn't remember that happening. He sits down at the side of the road so he doesn't fall down.

He drifts for a while, half-awake, half-dreaming, then an EMT is shaking him, saying, "Mr Graham? Mr Graham, there you are. Hey, Benny, he's conscious. Mr Graham, we're taking you to the hospital now."

"Jesus fuck, what'd this guy do to himself?" His head is tipped back, gently, by gloved hands. "We're going to need a psych eval," the EMT says. "Okay now Mr Graham, I need you to sit here on this gurney. Just like that, good."

They help him lie down but he's swallowing mouthfuls of blood again and he coughs and coughs, spitting it back up.

"Sir, you need to keep your head turned to the side. Mr Graham?"

He's being lifted, a needle stuck in his arm. Someone is holding his head down, strapping it in place.

They're going to take him somewhere terrible. They're going to do to him what they're doing to Hannibal. Strap him down in six-point restraints and shock him until there's nothing left. They're going to kill him.

Will fights them when they try to strap him down the rest of the way. Someone is making a horrible keening sound and Will feels it rattling up through his throat, through the destruction of his face.

They can't hold him, they can't. He's shedding this skin. He is on fire. He is a god.

"Mr Graham we need you to calm down. Squeeze my hand if you can hear me."

He isn't Will Graham anymore. He's more than that, he's less than that.

There is movement. There is light. There are voices and faces and he is all of them, he is nothing, he is everything.

They put another needle in his arm and he is asleep.

The next thing Will knows he's lying in a hospital bed with soft restraints on his wrists. His face hurts so much he thinks he might actually black out. The beeping of his heart-rate monitor is going nuts and a nurse floats into view.

"Hey there," the nurse says. "Welcome back." He slips an ice chip into Will's mouth and fiddles with the morphine drip.

"Cuffs," Will says around the ice chip. He needed the moisture, and the numbing cold. He's so grateful he could weep. "Please."

The nurse shakes his head. "We have to leave those on until your psych eval, okay? Just a bit longer."

The morphine drags Will back under.

He surfaces a few times, different faces checking his vitals, helping him sip water, adjusting his medication. He's still cuffed to the bed and each time he asks them to let him go. Each time they say no.

Will wakes up and stays awake eventually. There's another nurse checking his chart. "My dogs," he says.

The nurse sets the chart down. "Hello," she says. "How are you feeling?'

"I have dogs," Will says. "I need to go home." Talking makes his face light up with pain.

She adjusts the bed for him so he's sitting up slightly and doesn't have to have the conversation flat on his back. "Once you've seen the doctor I'll get you some paper so you can write down the name and number of one of your neighbours and I'll give them a call."

The doctor, Will soon realizes, is not just the usual kind, but a psychiatrist. "I'm going ask you a few questions. I don't want you taxing the stitches in your cheek so just indicate yes or no and we'll go from there."

Will glares at him and jerks one hand against the padded cuffs. He is ignored.

"Do you remember what happened to you?"

Probably he should have thought of some lie to tell emergency services but he didn't, so now it's time to persuade them that he's not self-harming or whatever it is they think he's done. "Fix boat motors," Will mumbles. "Got drunk, kept working. Fixed myself pretty good instead."

The concern on the doctor's face starts to ease. "You were pretty upset when you were brought in."

"Don't like being held down," Will says, utterly truthfully.

They believe him. They call his neighbours who promise to put water out for the dogs on their property and call them over - no one wants to go into his house since no one's quite sure how they'll react without Will there.

He's told he won't be quite so pretty any more. Will doesn't care.

He's high as a kite on pain medication when he calls BSHCI and asks if he can speak to Hannibal. "I'm in a lot of pain," Will says, staring down at the bandaging on his arm. "And I really miss him. I know he can't call back, motherfucker could at least write me a letter. I miss him. Can you just tell him? Please." He hangs up before he can embarrass himself further and then realizes he never left his name.

Eventually he gets to go home. He stares at his face in the mirror and barely recognizes himself at all but the dogs climb all over him. They, at least, know him and miss him.

Will repaints the wall, re-stains the floor, and when he tries to find the place where he buried what little remains there were, he can't. It's the third time he's got away with murder. He sits out on his porch, drinks too much whiskey, and doesn't have room to care, he's so full up with missing Hannibal and his old life, before it all fell apart.

Chapter 22

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Will heals. He has full range of motion in his arm and hand, which is really all he cared about. The scar's a little itchy on occasion, but that's to be expected. If he wears long sleeves he forgets about it entirely.

His face on the other hand doesn't fare as well. It heals, sure, but the doctors were right, it's not pretty. Worse though, it hurts. The cut wasn't clean, the blade wasn't clean, and he shouldn't have done any of the things he did. Whiskey was probably a bad choice, in retrospect. The jagged line cuts down his face, right through his top lip and, whatever the reason, he's developed a dark red, painful keloid. He tries growing a beard to hide what he can of it, but the hair growing next to the scar just makes it hurt more.

The little life he was building for himself starts to fall apart. He's not vain, but people stare now. Will's heard teenagers sniggering, little kids asking their parents what's wrong with his face. His fishing buddies don't ask, but he can't bring himself to lie to them. More than one of them has done time so he tells them it's an old prison grudge and that it's taken care of. They look at him differently after that. None of them treat him differently - it's hard to when you barely say two words to each other that aren't fishing, poker, or beer related - but still, he sees his own reflection through them, and it's so warped from what it used to be.

Will's not just that guy with the dogs any more. Not that he was even that, really, but it was nice to pretend for a while. They've seen behind the curtain where a murderer lives, some crawling, confused creature. He feels like he's stuck in the middle of a metamorphosis.

Will thinks about calling up Quantico and seeing if anyone needs a profiler but he can't bring himself to prepare so many lies. He murdered three people, and none of them in the line of duty. He has no business out in the field any more and there's no way he's teaching again.

He drinks more to combat the pain in his face. It doesn't stop the dreams. He dreams of blood on his hands, of building his house out of bones and gore. He dreams of Hannibal, the antlers of the Ripper's avatar rising from Hannibal's skull, disappearing into gathering darkness. He dreams of them falling down together on sheets spun from human hair. Will's head is full of blood rain and sand that gives way under his feet. It seems so cruel that he can dream of such terrible things and when he wakes he finds his cheeks wet with tears - not from fear, but with loss. He's clutching at shadows tying to figure out his place in the world.

Will fills his house with boat motors. He puts his head down and tries not to make increasingly ludicrous jail-break plans. He resigns himself to his own life.

The first Will hears about anything is when he's woken up at the asscrack of dawn by his dogs pitching a fit at the front door. He grabs his loaded rifle and cocks it, instantly awake. Will twitches the curtain back and sees a hoard of people congregated on his front walk. Confused and hungover, Will opens the door and finds himself being photographed.

"You're trespassing," Will says, turning his face away from the blinding flashes lighting up the pre-dawn. "Get the fuck off my property. If you don't leave, I'll have you all arrested."

Will takes two steps backwards and slams his door in their faces. He doesn't want to hear what they're shouting at him, what they want his opinion on. He doesn't want to know what's happening because there is absolutely no way in hell that it's good news. Will sits down on the floor with his dogs, and lets them flow over him. They're worried, but they're warm and reassuring, and Will can pretend he's not shaking.

He calls out, "I'm giving you call to the count of ten and then I'm letting my dogs out."

By the time he opens the door, the reporters have retreated to the property line.

At precisely seven in the morning, Will ducks out the back and cuts across the sand to avoid the news vans parked all along the road. They can't get onto the dunes without risking getting stuck, and he's got a boat and enough gas to get him and his dogs to the trading post cum gas station that only the locals know about. It looks a little like a shack, which is probably why the tourists never notice it. There aren't any reporters.

Will leaves his dogs outside and buys a cup of coffee at the counter from Kayla, the eternally unimpressed fourteen year-old daughter of the owner. She works summers there and she bats her eyelashes at him and tosses her bleach-brittle hair over her shoulder. She leans on the counter trying to artfully display her cleavage to him. She doesn't really have any to display, still gangly and childlike. Will keeps his eyes on the wall of cigarettes behind her. He genuinely cannot fathom why she would even try to flirt with him. Usually he makes a little small talk with her or her father, depending on who's behind the counter - sometimes a pimply young man from the upper keys - but today he can barely breathe.

"You got the papers in?" Will asks.

"Sure thing, Mr. Graham," Kayla says. "Haven't got them out yet."

She flips open a knife and cuts the binding on a stack of papers. Kayla brings one over, unfolding it as she comes back. She doesn't make it to the counter before her face changes. "Is this you?" she asks, setting the paper down in front of him. She's waiting to see how he reacts before she gives anything away, but her voice shakes just a little. She's scared.

Will's picture is on the front page. It's from his release. He looks startled and confused, and a little bit terrified. But it's not just his picture there. The other half of the front page is taken up by Hannibal Lecter's mug shot. Of course Hannibal managed to take a good mug shot.

KILLER CANNIBAL IN THE KEYS? the headline asks. Will's stomach feels like it's trying to crawl out of his mouth.

"Turn on the TV," Will says. His voice is hoarse.

Kayla doesn't ask questions. The shitty old television crackles with static and she tweaks the antenna until the picture clears.

The ticker tape at the bottom declares the breaking news is the escape of Doctor Hannibal Lecter, better known as 'Hannibal the Cannibal,' from the Baltimore State Hospital for the Criminally Insane.

A strange sense of calm washes over Will. He sips his coffee. He feels weightless and like everything is finally coming into focus. It occurs to him that Hannibal told him not to come by the hospital but that he also said 'until we meet again' and not 'goodbye.'

"...not attempt to apprehend him," the newscaster is saying. "Hannibal Lecter is considered extremely dangerous. If you see him, please contact local authorities. Police warn the residents of Sugarloaf Key to be especially vigilant. Lecter's well-publicized obsession with ex-profiler Will Graham has lead police to believe he may try to contact Mr Graham who currently resides in Florida." The picture changes to footage of him from that morning, in his underwear and a sweat-damp tee, one hand still holding his rifle, the other up against the flashes. "Mr Graham refused to comment."

It's all Will needs. "Turn it off," he says.

Kayla hits the remote and the picture dies away. "What," she says, voice wavering. She wraps her arms around herself like she's cold. "Why is a serial killer looking for you?"

Will tells himself that, for all he knows, Hannibal could be halfway to Mexico by now. He could be in Argentina, if he's managed to pick up a fake passport. Will doesn't doubt he has fake passports. There is actually no reason to believe Hannibal would risk capture by seeking him out. He tells himself it isn't a nauseous mixture of disappointment and hope in his stomach.

"He's not coming here," Will says, half trying to convince himself. Hannibal isn't capable of forming those sorts of attachments. He's hollow inside. He isn't coming for Will. "He told me once that he doesn't form attachments that he can't do without. I haven't heard from him in two years. Hannibal Lecter will be half-way across the globe by now." Will scrubs a hand over his face, palm rough on his scar. The pain doesn't help him focus like he thought it would. It's distracting. If Hannibal comes...Will doesn't want to know what he'll think about the scar. "Kayla, listen to me very carefully. He doesn't hurt kids. If he does come, if he asks you where I live, tell him. Be polite and he'll leave you alone." Will hopes he doesn't sound disappointed when he says, "But I promise, he's not coming here."

The bell over the door jingles and they both startle. It's not him.

Will pays for his coffee and leaves.

By the time he gets back to the house, the news cycle has had plenty of time to chew the story over and Will has never been so grateful, or so frustrated, that he doesn't have a television or a computer. He gets out the shitty old radio he listens to while working on boats and fiddles with it until he finds what he's looking for.

Hannibal murdered two guards and a nurse with what authorities now believe was a broken bit of pen. He disappeared off the streets and no one has seen him since. No suspiciously

stolen cars. No credible sightings. No more deaths. He just disappeared. Everyone he ever knew seems to be terrified that there might be some sort of revenge spree. Will knows better.

Will packs up all his stuff. He unpacks it. He repacks it.

Hannibal doesn't come but it's a long way from Baltimore to Florida when you're not able to just hop on a plane.

Will tells himself he isn't waiting for Hannibal to show up but he gets a haircut and cleans his house, airing it out so it smells a little bit less like an alcoholic and his four thousand dogs live there.

Hannibal doesn't come.

Eventually the reporters get tired of hanging around and stop haunting his property. They leave. Will is alone again.

It's about four months after Hannibal disappeared, about dusk, when the dogs start barking and growling at the door. Will learned his lesson. He shushes the dogs and cocks the gun, loud enough that whoever's out there will be able to hear it. "Take your Aryan bullshit and get the fuck off my property," Will says.

"Please don't shoot me," the man on the other side of the door says, calm and vaguely amused. "I promise I have brought no bullshit, Aryan or otherwise."

Will puts the gun down on the desk and opens the door, blocking the dogs with his body. He knows that voice. Oh, god, he knows who it is.

Hannibal is wearing black jeans, a Black Flag t-shirt, and a beat up jean jacket. His hair is dyed black and long enough to tie back in a paintbrush ponytail. He has a beard that's mostly grey. He's thinner, pared down, lean and hungry. He looks like a stranger, but it's Hannibal. He stands on the porch, holding a hand out to Will. "I told you I would see you again."

Will shuts the door before the dogs can get out, and doesn't turn the light on. He can't take another step though, paralyzed. His legs feel like trees rooted into the ground. Hannibal is the one who takes two steps forward until Will's backed up against the door and there's no way for Hannibal to miss the changes made to his face.

"Oh, mon cheri. Qu'est-ce qu'ils t'ont fait?" Hannibal touches the ridge of scar tissue with his fingertips, gently, so soft Will can barely feel it at all.

Will turns his face away and hears himself say, "You shouldn't have come here."

Hannibal grabs a fistful of Will's hair and forcibly makes Will look at him. Will closes his eyes. "Do you think that now we are on the other side of the bars that you can tell me what to do?" he says, low and dangerous.

"No," Will says, but he can't bear to open his eyes and actually see.

Hannibal yanks hard on his hair, shaking him. "Look at me when I'm speaking to you," he says. "Do you think I care? Do you think it makes any difference at all to me?"

Will opens his eyes and Hannibal isn't disgusted, he isn't even put off at all. He's pissed that someone put their hands on something he considers his, but he's not angry at Will.

"Holy shit," Will says. "You're actually here."

Hannibal smiles then and lets go. "Do what you need to do so your dogs leave us alone." He takes a step back and Will feels unmoored and shaky. The dogs are still barking and snarling on the other side of the door.

Will tells them to hush and that Hannibal is a friend. Then he opens the door and they fall over each other to greet Hannibal, tongues lolling out, tails wagging. Hannibal lets them smell his hands, and watches as they race across the sand, chasing each other.

"I can leave the door open," Will says. "No one comes out here."

Hannibal moves so quickly, he'd forgotten that. One moment Hannibal is an arm's length away, the next he has one hand wrapped around Will's throat, pushing him backwards into the house, the other unbuckling Will's belt.

"You're too thin, you don't take care of yourself," Hannibal complains, popping open the buttons on Will's jeans. "Where's your bedroom?"

Will shoves at the jacket, drags the t-shirt over Hannibal's head. "Fuck, you look good," he says, pressing kisses to every bit of skin he can reach.

"It was this or Hawaiian shorts and a shirt from Disneyland," Hannibal says dryly. He doesn't bother with the buttons on Will's shirt, just gets his hands on it and pulls it open. "I thought this marginally less ridiculous."

The bedsprings shriek when he pushes Hannibal on the bed and Hannibal winces just a little. Will kneels on the floor so he can peel the jeans off him. Hannibal isn't wearing underwear and Will can smell him, sweat and musk. Will presses his face against Hannibal's thigh, overwhelmed. The jeans drop to the floor and then Hannibal's hands are back in his hair, pulling, so Will has to get up onto the bed too. He crawls up so he's straddling Hannibal, his own jeans falling off his hips.

"I mean here," Will says. "You look good here."

Chapter End Notes

I guess it could end here, but no! There's more to come!

Chapter 23

Will never bothered fixing the overhead light in his bedroom so it's mostly dark except for the light spilling in from the other room. In the dark, Hannibal looks more like himself - the strangeness of his dyed hair less obvious. Will touches his fingers to Hannibal's beard, tugging on it before he leans down for a kiss.

"I cleaned my house for you, just so you know," he says. "Got a haircut and everything."

"So sentimental," Hannibal says.

"Polite," Will says, smirking. "You look like a Warped Tour roadie."

Will can feel Hannibal smile into their next kiss. "How I missed you," Hannibal says. He hooks his thumbs in the waist of Will's jeans and boxers and tugs them down further. Will kneels up so Hannibal can pull them over the curve of his ass. He's just wondering how he's going to get his jeans off his legs when Hannibal flips them over so Will is on his back, and pulls them off the rest of the way.

They're here. They're both free. Will grinds up against Hannibal, tips his head back and laughs. The laugh hiccoughs into a gasp when Hannibal bites at his throat and gets a hand around both of their cocks. He holds onto Hannibal's hair with one hand, clutches at his shoulder with the other. Hannibal is real and solid in his arms, eyes black in the darkness, watching Will with devotion as deep as the ocean.

"I didn't think you were coming," Will admits. Hannibal is probably going to have bruises on his shoulder by the time they're done, but Will doesn't care. He wants to see his marks on Hannibal's skin. Proof that they were here together.

Hannibal pinches Will's inner thigh and Will yelps."You should know better than to doubt me," Hannibal says, disapproving. "I would murder the world to find you again."

Will has never understood Hannibal more than in that moment; he wants to crack Hannibal's ribs open and crawl inside him, he wants to touch the most vital parts of him so he can understand their workings, because there must be something strange inside this man, something different. Nothing so ordinary as flesh and blood could make him this way. He rolls them back over, pinning Hannibal underneath him.

Will rolls his hips, their cocks pressed together, holding himself up so he can watch Hannibal's face. "I tried to forget about you," he says. "I tried to leave you behind." He wants to touch every part of Hannibal with every part of himself - his teeth, sharp and crooked - his tongue - the inside of his cheeks. He pushes three fingers into Hannibal's mouth and kisses him around them, wet and messy.

Hannibal licks at his fingers and then pulls his hand away. Spit trails in a delicate thread before Will rubs his fingers over Hannibal's lips. "You may," Hannibal says, serious and quiet in the small space between their mouths. "If you like."

For a second Will is confused. Then hot pleasure shocks through him and he kisses Hannibal fiercely. "Fuck, yes, please," he says, then, "Shit. No, I don't have any lube."

"That didn't stop me," Hannibal points out.

Will rests his forehead against Hannibal's. "I'm not a sadist," he says. "I don't want to hurt you."

"Did I hurt you?" Hannibal asks.

Will reminds himself to re-evaluate Hannibal's pathology again, preferably when they're not both naked. "No," he admits. "Not really." He doesn't mention that he also doesn't have a) Hannibal's experience with this sort of thing or b) Hannibal's unpleasant history.

"Now I am telling you to do this." Hannibal wraps one hand around Will's throat. "So do as you're told, Will," he says. The pressure on Will's airway must be making him stupid, Will thinks, because his heart swells with fondness for this terrible man.

He hitches one of Hannibal's thighs up and pushes, slowly, carefully, a finger into him. Hannibal's grip tightens so he's actually choking Will. It doesn't make as much difference as he probably thinks it does. Will already feels lightheaded. He's getting to do something that no one else has ever been given permission to do.

He eases another finger in and rubs carefully at Hannibal's prostate. Hannibal's free hand clenches in the sheets and he tips his head back, breath hissing between his teeth.

"I'm going to swear a lot," Will gasps. "Just so you know. You feel so fucking good, is this okay?"

"It's fine," Hannibal says, which isn't exactly a rousing endorsement.

Will looks down between them and, to his dismay, Hannibal isn't hard any more. He has barely thought of stopping before Hannibal lets go of his throat so he can catch hold of Will's wrist. "I will tell you when I want to stop," Hannibal says, but Hannibal is staring up at the ceiling with a determined set to his jaw. It's not exactly enthusiastic consent, that's for sure. It's not enthusiastic anything. Hannibal swallows, throat clicking dryly, loud enough for Will to hear it. "I want you with me. I want you every way I can have you."

"But-" Will says and Hannibal digs his fingers into Will's wrist hard enough to really hurt. "Okay," Will says and shuffles down the bed so he can tease Hannibal with little licks, sloppy kisses at the base of his cock. He waits until Hannibal's eyes slip closed and then sucks his cock properly, curling his fingers carefully.

Will understand the desire to consume someone, in a metaphorical sense; needing to take them into you, to have them in your cells and in your DNA, as opposed to destroying them. He sucks Hannibal until he's hard again, trying not to cough as his cock fills out enough to hit his gag reflex. He straightens out and licks at one of Hannibal's nipples, biting when it starts to rise. Hannibal tangles one hand into Will's hair, tugging just because he can, and because Will likes it.

"First time you did it to me I thought I'd hate it, but I didn't, I don't. You're a sadistic prick, but God, you made it so good. I want to do that for you," Will says. "Don't move."

It's not a big house, thank all the powers that be, and it only takes him a minute to duck into the kitchen and grab the economy sized bottle of canola oil from the cupboard.

He nearly hurts himself in his haste to get back to the bedroom. What if Hannibal isn't there? What if this is all some fucked up dream? But Hannibal is there, and he wishes he had a camera to capture the look on Hannibal's face when he sees what Will is carrying. "Shut up," he says pre-emptively. "We don't have to do this, or you can fuck me, but this is all I've got so..."

Hannibal sighs. "I'm not sure what's worse - using this as lubricant, or the fact that you cook with this deplorable excuse for olive oil." He tugs Will closer. "It will serve, I suppose."

"Good," Will says. "Because we've fucked in a prison cell with stolen lube, so I see this as a big step up for us."

He wishes he'd brought a bowl, or a towel, or something because even as he tips the oil over his hand, Will already can tell it's going to make one hell of a mess. It soaks into the sheets and drips down Hannibal's thighs.

He pushes two fingers into Hannibal, rubbing the oil into his skin with the other hand. "How was the loony bin?"

"I spent most of my time there in my mind palace." Hannibal grabs the back of Will's neck and pulls so he's close enough to kiss. "I told you to fuck me and I expect you to listen."

"We've got time," Will says, but he eases his fingers back out and slicks himself up with the oil. He's a little concerned one of them is going to just slip right off the bed, but this thing between them has survived two years of separation. It can survive a few not-so-porn moments.

He skims his hands up over Hannibal's ribs and back down to his hips. Hannibal hooks one leg over Will's shoulder and Will feels Hannibal's hand around his cock. Will obediently presses forwards until he can feel the gentle give of Hannibal's hole.

"Do it," Hannibal says.

Will kisses Hannibal's knee, the closest part of his body to his mouth, and does as he's told. Hannibal's leg spasms once and Will slips forward, pushing deeper into him than he'd meant to. Hannibal bites back a groan and he turns his head to the side, breathing heavily.

"Easy," Will says as Hannibal opens up under him, a slow, smooth stretch. "You feel good. God you feel amazing, tell me it's okay." Will leans over him and bites at the sharp line of his jaw. It's putting more of a strain on Hannibal's thighs and his flexibility but Will shifts his weight so he can get a hand on Hannibal's cock.

Hannibal opens his eyes with what looks like effort. "Doucement, s'il te plaît," Hannibal says. "Lentement."

"Yeah, anything." Will does as he's told, hardly moving at all. "N'es-tu plus mon maître, ne suis-je plus ton esclave?" he says softly, rubbing his thumb over the head of Hannibal's cock then down to press against his perineum.

Hannibal huffs out a laugh and they both flinch with pleasure at the way his body tightens. "I thought of you so often," Hannibal says. "Your appalling French accent."

"It's Louisiana, cher," Will says, moving slowly now, carefully, a steady press in and a slow withdrawal. He tips more oil over them and pushes back in. "Whole 'nother animal." He starts to fuck Hannibal, keeping it at an easy pace. Even then, Hannibal's gaze keeps drifting out of focus, going somewhere awful probably if the way he's softening in Will's hand is any indication. "The Aryans sent someone to kill me," Will says, and Hannibal's attention snaps to him. "That's what happened to my face."

"What?" Hannibal says, relaxing into what Will is doing.

"I shot his knee to shreds. Could've put a bullet in his head, but I cut his throat and butchered him like a pig. I thought about you. I wanted you to see it. I buried his bones in the sand, let the dogs lick up the blood."

Hannibal cups Will's face in both hands and kisses him with a breathless sort of desperation. Will decides it's a good time to put his back into it and he braces himself against the mattress with one slippery hand and fucks into Hannibal in earnest until Hannibal has to push back against the headboard to prevent them from crashing up into it. Will's always figured he was about average when it came to the size of his dick, but Hannibal's breathing catches on little moans like it's the best fuck he's ever had, like Will's almost too big to take. Will grits his teeth and tries not to come when he remembers that - as far as he knows - he's the first person, the first one who counts, to get to do this to Hannibal.

Hannibal pushes Will's hand away from his cock so he can jerk himself off, tight and fast.

"I missed you so much," Will confesses. "And he tried to kill me, so I carved him up and fed him to my dogs. And then I drank too much and I got curious, and - fuck, Hannibal - I ate some too."

Hannibal's eyes go very wide and then his whole body goes tight around Will. "Oh," he says, softly. "Oh, Will."

Will presses their foreheads together and pulls out as Hannibal starts to come. It barely takes a touch of his own hand before he's coming too, over Hannibal's stomach and his still-twitching cock. "Fuck," Will says, panting. Under him, Hannibal is a mess of oil and come. Will grins down at him, trailing his fingers through the mess. "You have the weirdest idea of dirty talk."

Chapter 24

Will flops down on the bed next to Hannibal and winds up lying in what feels like a gallon of oil. He doesn't even care. He flexes his feet and stretches. For the first time in months, maybe years, he feels like he's actually free of that jail cell. His scar is pulling uncomfortably because of his stupid grin, and he doesn't care about that either. They're pressed together from shoulder to hip and Will bumps one foot into Hannibal's playfully.

Hannibal is quiet for long moments as his breathing slows. "Did you really cannibalize that man?" he asks eventually.

Will rolls onto his side so he can run his fingers over the scar on Hannibal's stomach, rubbing come and oil into his skin. "Hell no," he says. "I have no idea what diseases he had."

Hannibal looks genuinely disappointed.

Will wishes he was ten years younger so he could get it up again right away. He wants to pull Hannibal back into his arms and wrestle around, slick and sweaty, push against his body until they both come again. He's too tired though. He kisses Hannibal's shoulder, biting a little. "I take it you like the idea."

Hannibal twists onto his side, lips parted as though he's going to say something but he's cut off by the bedsprings groaning like they're dying. He says instead, "When I mentioned a real bed this was not what I had in mind."

"Yeah, well, I sleep on the couch," Will says, yawning. "C'mon, let's strip the sheets and go jump in the ocean. When's the last time you went skinny dipping?"

It takes some convincing - mostly Will stealing the blankets and going out into the waves himself - but eventually Hannibal follows him across the sand, a pale ghost under the hangnail moon. Will drags him into the water and lets the tide push at them while he helps Hannibal rinse off.

"You are not helping," Hannibal says, pushing his wandering hands away and Will laughs. Up on the beach Gene barks. Pickles comes to join them, splashing and paddling around them. "Your dog is more helpful."

Will dunks himself under the water. It's cool enough to wake him up a little. Hannibal is watching him with the same starved look he had on Will's front stoop so Will stretches a little, showing himself off. He's gratified by the intensity of Hannibal's desire. "I wasn't lying about feeding them human flesh," he says. "The dogs, I mean."

The moonlight reflects in Hannibal's eyes like any other predator. "Baby steps," he says, and kisses Will breathless, the black dye running from his hair staining his skin in lines that looks like blood in the dark.

Will finds he can in fact get it up again and he stands in the shallows, Hannibal kneeling at his feet like a penitent on the sand. The man sucking his cock has murdered more people than Will can really understand, he's cold and cruel and there is something in him that was always broken. He is not going to be saved or redeemed. But here he is, and Will wants him. Will isn't sure what that says about him as a person - nothing good - but he's done caring. He can have this.

Hannibal looks up at him, face cast in stark shadows, cheeks hollowed as he swallows around Will's cock. Will clutches at Hannibal's hair and shoulders so he doesn't fall over when he orgasms and watches as Hannibal licks come off his swollen mouth with a pleased expression on his face. Will pulls him to his feet and kisses him. Hannibal's knees are scraped raw by the sand but he doesn't seem bothered by it, just follows Will back into the house.

"It's not the cannibalism," Hannibal says as he dries himself off.

"Huh?" Will says, distracted. The bed is a disaster but there isn't enough room for both of them on the couch. Will just gets the rest of his towels and puts them down on the mattress, then sheets, then a blanket.

"It's imagining you as you take a life; the animal strength and the quiet power that comes from holding life or death in your hands."

Will glances up. "Oh," he says. "*Oh*. I know. If eating people was what got you off, we wouldn't be..." he waves a hand, trying to describe what they are. "You don't need to explain, Hannibal."

Hannibal looks away first. "I know," he says.

Will stretches out on the bed. "Don't get shy on me now, you narcissist," Will says and smirks up at Hannibal.

"Such things you call me," Hannibal says.

"If the boot fits," Will replies.

Instead of answering, Hannibal proceeds to ruin Will's only other set of sheets by flipping him over onto his stomach, literally pouring the oil over him, and fucking Will until he stops sassing him. Will's pretty sure he's not going to come again and says as much, but Hannibal disagrees, and pulls one last orgasm out of him with rough hands tight around his cock. Will's breathing comes out like sobs and he collapses onto the stained sheets, whole body tired now.

"Fuck," he says. Hannibal smacks the back of his thigh. Will moans and flaps a hand at him.

Hannibal pulls the sheets off and uses them to wipe Will off a little. "I suppose we shall have to sleep on the towels," he says. He doesn't sound especially bothered by the idea, too busy pushing his thumb just inside of Will so he can watch the come leak out of him. Will doesn't bother to argue, already half-asleep.

The dogs mill around, confused by Will's unusual relocation and the guest. Beans tries to get up on the bed with them three times before giving up with a loud sigh. Will falls asleep with one hand wrapped around Hannibal's bicep, like if he doesn't hold on, Hannibal might disappear again.

He wakes up in the middle of the night, confused for a second. One of the dogs is whining and Will realizes it's because Hannibal is crying in his sleep, body twitching with nightmares. Will strokes Hannibal's hair back from his face and uses his eidetic memory to repeat some of the Lithuanian folk tales Hannibal had once recited to him. Eventually Hannibal falls back into deeper sleep and Will, his own eyes hot and his throat tight in sympathy, does the same.

Will is the first one to wake up the next morning, his body unused to sobriety. Beans is on the bed again, curled up over his feet. He gives her a stern look and her tail thumps the mattress. Will slides out of bed, careful not to wake Hannibal and Beans follows after him.

Will lets the dogs out and relieves himself outside as well. There's a strange car parked at the end of his driveway, close to the road. Will goes back inside, puts the coffee on and leans against the bedroom door, watching Hannibal sleep. He looks like he needs it. Will can see the shadow of his ribs and the dark circles under his eyes.

He digs through Hannibal's jeans, discarded on the floor - and from the looks of it, slept on by at least one dog - and finds car keys. Will goes out to investigate and sure enough the keys fit the car. There's a duffle in the back, a laptop bag, and a gun - a semi-automatic .45 - wrapped neatly in a shoulder holster. There's three different knife holsters next to it; ankle, wrist, belt. He's not sure what it says that Hannibal came to him unarmed. Of course, even unarmed Hannibal is dangerous but still, he left everything in the car. Will wonders how much doubt Hannibal had that he would be welcome. He gathers up the duffle and weapons and locks the car back up. The laptop's no good here, he doesn't have the internet.

When he gets back to the house, Hannibal is up, jeans unbuttoned and hanging low off his hips. The scar on his stomach is still red but not nearly so much as it was last time Will saw it. The coffee is steaming in two mismatched mugs, the whole scene a little surreal.

Will drops Hannibal's things on the couch. "Planning a speedy getaway?" he asks.

Hannibal gives him an arch look. "Your coffee is surprisingly tolerable," he says. The way he's holding onto the mug says that it's more than tolerable and that he's one small step away from abandoning his dignity and moaning like he was having the best sex of his life while drinking it. Will knows how he feels.

"After a lifetime of cop shop coffee and a year of that prison shit I decided life's too short to drink the bad stuff," Will says. "I have to drive forever to get it, but it's worth it."

" No caffeine in the hospital, sadly. I nearly wept when I had a McDonalds' coffee," Hannibal admits. "I mostly ate at drive-throughs, to minimize interaction with the public." No wonder he's lost weight if his only option after being institutionalized was fast food.

Will comes over so he can get his own mug and wrap his other arm around Hannibal's waist. "Try not to get too emotional," he says, "but I've got a whole fridge full of actual food, that

doesn't come in a wrapper." He kisses the corner of Hannibal's mouth and lets him go so Hannibal can rummage through his cupboards and fridge.

"I shall make you something," Hannibal declares, making pleased sounds when he discovers Will's spice rack.

It's only when there's a near-gourmet scramble on Will's plate that Will remembers his prediction that Hannibal would be one hell of a chef. He stuffs more food into his mouth and feels very smug about his own profiling abilities. Not only was he right, but he gets to reap the benefits.

Hannibal pours himself a second cup of coffee and, too casually, says, "I have a way out." He stares out the window over the sink and sips at his coffee. Will waits for him to finish the thought. "I know you won't turn me in," Hannibal says, "but are you coming with me?"

It's on the tip of Will's tongue to say 'of course' and to be offended that Hannibal even had to ask but Hannibal holds up a hand, stopping him.

"Don't make any decisions yet," Hannibal says. "Think about it. I wanted to see you again, but if you come with me you're making several choices that cannot be taken back. I'm not expecting an answer right away. If you don't mind I'll invite myself to stay here for a week or so. It will take at least that long to arrange things."

Will nods absently. "Of course," he says. Hannibal goes outside and sits on the screened in porch, watching the ocean, for a while until he falls asleep out there, Sadie curled up at his feet. Will lets him be, he looks like he needs it.

Will washes the dishes and thinks about it. He thinks about it while he does the laundry - he digs a series of ragged band shirts out of Hannibal's duffle and washes them too. He thinks about it until Hannibal comes back inside, bends him over the arm of the couch and fucks him until he can't think about anything at all.

They heat up leftover gumbo for lunch and eat it in bed, Will in his shorts and Hannibal in nothing but his skin. Will dozes a little after, head in Hannibal's lap while Hannibal massages the scar tissue on his face. It feels nice to have someone else's hands on him. He can feel Hannibal's heart beating steadily, the quiet sounds of digestion, his body is warm and alive, skin and muscle and the prickle of hair.

"I doubt the scar will ever go away entirely," Hannibal says. "But with the right vitamin oils and proper care I think we can ease your discomfort and the density of the tissue."

Will hums a vague agreement. He thinks about the possibility of spending the rest of his life like this: lazing in bed, good food, the dogs amusing themselves out by the water. He could actually see some of the world other than horrific crime scenes. He'd agree to wear whatever insane expensive nonsense Hannibal wanted and in exchange Hannibal would show him beautiful things, take him anywhere he asked. They'd eat in obscure restaurants where the food is so good you want to cry and Hannibal would be a controlling pain in the ass and order for both of them. Will would pretend to find it annoying, but he wouldn't actually care.

They'd wander the world, doing whatever they wanted, watching humanity flow past them like a river.

It's a nice dream. It's a possibility even, but it comes with one hell of a price tag.

"How much of what you do is a pathology?" Will asks.

Hannibal looks at him with wounded dignity and doesn't pretend not to know what Will is talking about. "I do not have a *pathology*," he says.

"Bullshit," Will says. "You don't eat that many people without it being a little bit compulsive."

Will has seen Hannibal's capacity for violence. He's seen the crime scenes. They don't quite sit together in his head though. The man sharing his bed is a killer, but so is Will. There's a big leap between that and serial murders and cannibalism. It seems like the only way he can gauge his own comfort level is to actually witness Hannibal at work and that really isn't something he can condone. The look on Hannibal's face says he's on the same thought path.

"Would you stop, if I asked you to?" Will says. "Could you?" He understands, better than any other, how the murderous compulsion rises in the body, drowning out everything else. The screaming and the clamour to destroy, to create, to punish. Whatever the meaning behind the madness, Will sees it and he understands it. But how much of what Hannibal does is a manifestation of his bottomless desire to control everything around him, how much his god complex, how much a nameless hunger that has to be fed, no matter what logic or reason defy it?

Hannibal frowns and doesn't answer the question but he keeps massaging Will's scar. Will does sleep for a while, probably no more than fifteen or twenty minutes. When he wakes up Hannibal is dressed, standing at the window, watching the ocean again. Will doesn't blame him. He still sometimes feels like he's going to wake up back in a prison cell.

"I don't know if I could stop," Hannibal says, painful honesty in his voice. "I've been doing it for my entire adult life. It is a part of who I am."

Will scrubs a hand over his face. "Okay," he says, because he already knew that.

Hannibal turns around and does Will the courtesy of meeting his eyes when he says, "I won't lie to you, Will; I think I could stop, if I wanted to. I don't want to."

Chapter 25

Will doesn't want to have this conversation in his underwear. He doesn't want to have this conversation at all. Will gets up and grabs a clean t-shirt. He feels marginally more prepared to hash things out now. "Would you stop, if I asked you to?"

Hannibal says, "It's not your place to ask me anything." He just stands there, as though Will is supposed to accept something that's so blatantly an attempt to shut an uncomfortable conversation down. It's Hannibal's attempt to wrest control of an uncontrollable situation.

"That's a 'no' then?" Will says dryly.

He holds a lot more cards than he used to, and Hannibal knows it. They're not locked in a room together. He's pretty sure Hannibal won't hurt him badly enough to make any real difference. Hannibal is a wanted man. If Will wants to have this conversation, they will either have it, or Hannibal will have to leave without him. Will can see the muscles in Hannibal's jaw work as he clenches his teeth.

"You asked me to come with you," Will says. "I'm just trying to figure out what that means."

"You know what it means," Hannibal says with far more venom than is necessary and his tone speaks of cold, dark nights, corpses littering the earth underfoot, rives of blood. It's dining with the Devil and a never-ending hunger. It's bullshit. It's such bullshit it makes Will angry. There's more out there, there's a whole world out there but Hannibal seems determined to paint any prospective future as bleakly as possible.

Will's face is already hurting again from the tension running through him. "So what were the last, what, thirty years? The whole life you crafted for yourself, the life you built around yourself, telling yourself that it wasn't who you were. Newsflash, Hannibal, it was. We're more than just the parts of ourselves we hide, or expose. It's the whole of it. You would be just as bored wallowing in shadow as you were hiding in plain sight. You're always going to be reaching, Hannibal, because you're always curious and it makes you easily bored. There isn't any satisfaction. There's no winning."

"That's enough," Hannibal says, but Will isn't done.

Will crosses the little bedroom and gets up in Hannibal's face, staring him down. He knows it's a bad idea the second he does it. Hannibal is angry and the anger isn't calm or rational, it's violence and blood. The moment snaps between them and Hannibal shoves Will backwards, hard. He hits the wall with a thud, and Will can see the fury rising up. "Shit," Will says, realization washing over him. "You're going to go on a spree, aren't you."

Hannibal grabs his t-shirt and tackles him down to the floor. Will struggles but Hannibal gets him on his belly, arm wrenched up behind his back. He pushes Will's face against the floor with his other hand, pinning him. There's sand on the floor and it grinds into Will's cheek, his scar feels white hot.

"I am not some lunatic you can dissect," Hannibal snarls.

Will tries not to give Hannibal the satisfaction of hearing him cry out, but he can't help it. Hannibal is pushing too hard, and it hurts. Will is genuinely frightened Hannibal is going to break his arm, or dislocate his shoulder. "I can read everyone you fucking idiot," Will chokes out. "Hannibal, please, you're going to break my arm."

Hannibal stops leaning so hard on his head but doesn't ease up the angle he's got Will's arm at. "So what do you see, Will Graham?"

"If you go on a spree, just to show off, just to prove you're out there and they haven't caught you, *they will catch you*! You could do anything you wanted - fuck, *fuck* - Hannibal, they aren't going to catch you again-"

Will gets it then and curses himself as five kinds of fool. He sees now how much that year and a half in the BSHCI cost Hannibal. Will stops fighting, just lets himself go limp. He tilts his head as much as he can, literally showing Hannibal his throat.

"I'm not trying to dissect you," he says quietly. "You know me, you know the things I'll do for you."

Hannibal's harsh breathing slows and his crushing grip on Will's wrist loosens. "Yes," he says, as though coming back to himself from very far away. He lets Will's arm down a little.

Will takes a chance. "The drugs they had you on...How long did it take you to detox?" he asks. "One month? Two?"

The fight goes out of Hannibal and he lets go entirely and sits down on the floor next to Will. "I've only just finished titrating down off the secobarbital," he says.

Will sighs and rolls onto his back. "Still getting mood swings then?"

"Perhaps," Hannibal says, gently brushing the sand off Will's cheek. Will gives him a narrow look. "Yes," he amends.

"What'd they have you on?"

"Secobarbital. Cyproterone acetate. Sodium amytal and scopolamine, on occasion, for all the good it did them."

"Barbiturates, truth serum and," Will scours his memory. "Isn't cyproterone-"

Hannibal's mouth thins out. He looks tired and a little haggard. "Chemical castration, yes. I believe it was supposed to reduce my 'aggression.'" The scare quotes are audible in his tone.

"Jesus," Will says, sitting up. "The hell were they doing to you in there? You don't have to tell me. I just...Maybe hold off on any life-changing decisions until the mood swings stop, huh?" He rotates his shoulder. It's sore, but he's had worse. "You have no idea how many people want to go out in a blaze of glory. I get it, I do. But suicide by cop is still suicide. They won't catch you. You're smarter than them."

Hannibal clasps his hands around his knees. "Perhaps," he says. It's probably the most modest he's ever been in his life. He pushes his hair back from his face, frowning when it doesn't stay. "I am sorry, Will. I am not quite myself yet. It has been...difficult to stabilize."

Will gets up with a groan and waves for Hannibal to follow him out of the room. he digs out a bottle of his less-shitty whiskey and goes out onto the porch. It's another beautiful day on the keys. The porch is warm with the ocean breeze keeping it tolerable. The dogs are lounging in the shade of a nearby tree. After a minute Hannibal comes and sits next to him on the couch. Will cracks the bottle open and passes it to Hannibal.

"Don't be a bitch about it," he says, just to see Hannibal's disgruntled expression.

Hannibal instead gives him a fond look. "I know you say such things to provoke me. That you remain unafraid-"

"I'm afraid," Will says. "Drink the whiskey. I'm afraid because you don't know what to do with yourself without having to hide who you are, and that uncertainty makes you twice as dangerous." Hannibal looks pleased with that answer. "That's why I'm asking questions," Will continues, "I want to know what life you plan to build so I can decide if I want to be part of it. You don't have to decide right now, either."

Hannibal takes a slug of the whiskey and doesn't flinch from the burn. "There were plans," he says. "None of them worth much now. I underestimated how unpleasant the hospital would be." He passes the bottle to Will. "You were right about the restraints. And the ECT."

"Shit," Will says. "I'm sorry." He buys himself some time by taking a drink and then says, "Did anyone - I mean, were you..." There's no good way to finish that thought.

"Was I interfered with?" Hannibal says. "No. They spared me that indignity at least. Three different institutions, three different sets of cruelties." He takes the whiskey back. "It took time before they would believe in my compliance. Eventually they let me be in the cell without restraints. It was difficult to organize my thoughts. I spent a lot of time drifting in and out of dream states. What seemed like a perfectly coherent, lucid thought one moment was obvious drug-induced dream logic the next."

"You killed three people getting out," Will says.

Hannibal shrugs a little. "I did. A drop in the bucket. You know that." He drinks again and passes the bottle to Will. "You can try to rationalize your attraction to me, Will, but there isn't one you'll like. You recognize in me the same darkness you have inside you, only yours is uncultivated, repressed-"

Will snorts. "You keep saying that, but I don't think it's as true as you'd like."

"It could be," Hannibal says. "The things I could make you do." His voice is filled with longing.

With a few shots burning warmly in his stomach Will says, "Yeah? You had some time to think about it. Come up with anything good?"

Hannibal turns to look at him. "Are you asking me to talk dirty to you, Will Graham?"

Will knows this wasn't what Hannibal was saying, but it's what he wants to hear. He can't deal with Hannibal's murder fantasies right now. He'd rather hear actual sexual fantasies. So he slouches down, letting his legs fall open, one hand resting on his thigh, thumb millimeters from his dick.

Hannibal takes the whiskey from him and sets it on the porch. "I see. Shall I tell you how I'd like to bind your hands to the bed and make you come, and come, and come until you're sore and begging, and can no longer become erect?"

Will's hand twitches on his thigh. "Shit," he says. "Okay."

"By my count, with a few allowances, you have broken my rules about foul language seventeen times since I arrived here." Hannibal turns in his seat, one leg folded up underneath him, one arm on the back of the couch so he can lean in close to Will, voice a low rumble. "Shall I beat you, have you thank me for each stroke? Perhaps I would use my hand, put you over my knee to humiliate you. Or I could use a belt, watch you bleed for me."

Will's throat feels dry and he swallows convulsively, he shudders at the feel of Hannibal's breath on his throat. Hannibal leans in closer, one hand pressing over Will's dick.

"There are devices to enforce chastity. I would deny you release until it suited me otherwise. I would see your anger, frustration, desperation, and eventually your resignation. To know that I control your pleasure and you cannot defy me even if you try. Would you try, or would you be good for me?"

"I don't know," Will says moving Hannibal's hand away. He pushes Hannibal back down on the sofa and kneels between Hannibal's thighs, running his hands from Hannibal's knees to his hips before popping the button on his jeans. "How would you reward my good behaviour?" He tugs, and Hannibal lifts his hips enough for the jeans to slide down far enough for Will to duck under them, trapping Hannibal's feet around his back. "You let me strangle you, you let me fuck you. What else would you let me do?"

Hannibal's eyes are blown black with arousal and he says, "Anything," like a prayer or a promise when Will takes him into his mouth. "I would give you anything."

A promise extracted during sex is no promise at all, but Will believes it. "Just fear me, love me, do as I say, and I will be your slave?" Will says wryly, sitting back as much as he can in order to push his boxers down.

"Yes," Hannibal agrees, not catching the reference, just pulling Will down to kiss.

"We'll figure this out," Will says against Hannibal's mouth. "We'll think of something." He's too impatient to get lubricant, so he grinds against Hannibal, their cocks pressed in the warm space between their hips and stomachs, sliding on sweat and spit.

"Two years," Hannibal says. "Two years they took this from me. At my age..." He gets his hands on Will's ass and uses his grip to move Will's hips how he likes. Will bites at

Hannibal's throat and Hannibal curses. "I thought I might not recover," Hannibal admits. It doesn't take so very long for Will to prove to him again that the cyproterone acetate is cleared from his system.

When they're both sticky and sated, Will sprawled out on top of Hannibal, he thinks about how long the two years had felt for him, and how much longer it must have seemed for Hannibal; the things they did to him. He still looks exhausted. Will tugs at Hannibal's beard and gets up. "Take another nap," he suggests. "I'll make us something to eat and you can tell me about your exit strategy."

He tugs the jeans all the way off Hannibal's legs and tosses a blanket over him, ignoring his protests. By the time he gets to the door, Hannibal's already out like a light.

Will gets a bag of peas from the freezer to put on his sore shoulder and rests his forehead against the closed fridge door. He knows he should pick up the phone and call 911. They'd bury Hannibal so deep in the hospital he'd never see daylight again and the thought makes Will feel a little sick to his stomach. He can't turn Hannibal in. He's messed up, he knows that, but he also can't run off into the sunset with a serial killer. His morals won't bend that far.

"What the fuck am I going to do?" he asks the dogs and starts assembling some sandwiches.

Hannibal doesn't comment on the meal when he wakes up and stumbles groggily into the kitchen. Will makes him a cup of coffee and hands him a plate.

"I need to use a phone to organize my way across the border. Preferably one that isn't connected to you." Hannibal eats quickly, and Will can't see him having done that in his beautiful home. Something they both picked up in prison, he guesses. "The relationships I cultivated while in prison have earned me enough credit with the Barrio Azteca to get me across the border into Mexico. For a fee, of course, but nothing I can't manage."

"Barrio Azteca?"

Hannibal rubs his eyes, yawning. "They're a gang with control over a great deal of the cocaine traffic between Texas and Juarez. They're the enforcement arm, but the point is that I have a great deal of money and a rather interesting reputation which means they'll do me this one favour."

Will raises his eyebrows. "So who do you have to kill?"

Hannibal looks at him wearily. "Do you really want to know? The name will mean nothing to you. A rival gang member. They want an example made, and I certainly have the skills to do that."

"Fuck," he says. "Hannibal."

"Shall I tell you his crimes?" Hannibal asks. "The dozens of murders to his name? The women he's sold into sexual slavery, or the-"

"I get it," Will says. "I don't give a fuck about a dead gangster. I'm worried about what's going to happen when another Ripper murder shows up south of the border. The minute bodies start dropping people are going to start looking for you in that area, you understand that right? Now they know who you are. Every half-way weird death is going to be laid at your door."

Hannibal resumes eating. "I'm not planning on taking anything from him. They require him to die, preferably slowly, and for his body to be displayed. Some small elements - I believe they wish his tongue to be cut out and his head to be left separate from his body - will be given to me. There will be no tableau. I will be a weapon for them to wield."

"Just the once," Will says, slowly. An idea is beginning to form.

"They will regret it if they try to make me do otherwise," Hannibal says, and Will is oddly reassured.

Chapter 26

Will takes Hannibal to the general store by boat, the dogs all accompanying them, tongues hanging out like they're in a car with the windows rolled down. Hannibal seems equally pleased to be out on the water and Will passes over his own ten-dollar sunglasses so Hannibal can stop squinting into the sun.

"The dogs should have life jackets," Hannibal says when they hit a wave at a bad angle and everyone is sprayed with water.

"Not gonna happen," Will says. "They all swim just fine."

He notices that Sadie has attached herself to Hannibal and has her head on his knee, gazing up at him adoringly, the traitor. She clearly has terrible taste. Will thought dogs were supposed to have some kind of sixth sense about people. Hannibal is absently scratching her behind the ears though, just the way she likes, and her first owner - presumably neither a serial killer nor a cannibal - left her to die by the side of the road so...Will supposes from a dog's point of view things look a little differently.

When they get there, the store is unfortunately busy - that is, four or five people instead of none. Hannibal doesn't even hesitate and Will has to walk a little faster in order to catch up.

Kayla's behind the counter again and she gives Hannibal a long, searching look. "Who's he?" she asks. She hasn't taken a step back yet, but her weight is shifted so she can. Will's kind of proud of her. She's got good survival instincts. He feels a little bad for what he's about to do. He wants to tell her not to doubt her gut, that she's right. But that would be against his own interests.

Will doesn't smile at her because he almost never smiles at anyone. It would be suspicious if he did. "This is Nathan, a buddy of mine from New Orleans. Ex-cop, bounty hunter. Figured if Lecter does show up I'd like to have some protection."

Kayla relaxes, trusting. "Hey," she says, leaning over the counter.

"Bonjour, cher," Hannibal says in what is definitely not a Cajun accent, but Will's betting Kayla doesn't know that. He leans on the counter too, tipping his sunglasses down, a slow, flirtatious smile creeping onto his face.

Will punches him in the shoulder, like he might do to an old buddy who isn't Hannibal Lecter. "Don't be disgusting," he says. Then to Kayla, "Can he use your phone? Mine's all jacked up."

"Sure," she says to Hannibal, visibly smitten. She bites her lip in a move she probably picked up from tv shows. "No problem. There's a payphone at the back."

"Make your call," Will says. "Stop hitting on the locals."

Hannibal saunters away, a looseness in his hips that he doesn't usually have. It's distractingly arousing.

Kayla watches him go. Will frowns at her so he doesn't look at Hannibal. "He's old enough to be your father," he says, disapproving.

She only turns his way when Hannibal has disappeared behind racks of snack food. "Didn't seem to bother him," she says, all teenage bravado.

"Yeah, well, easy there Lolita, Ha-" Will swallows back Hannibal's name. "He's got a lot of things wrong with him."

She rolls her eyes at him and Will follows after Hannibal. Hannibal's got one arm resting on the wall in a casual lean. He looks like a totally different person, like the monster inside can slip its skin and put another on, like he could look like anything at all. Will's insides are changeable even as his outsides stay the same; Hannibal is the opposite. He can't change what's inside, but he can hide it. Will wonders how long he could play a role for. Who he is when no one's looking.

Hannibal's Spanish is rapid-fire and business-like. Will knows enough to catch that Hannibal's being less deferential than one might expect considering he's talking to someone in a dangerous cartel. Will supposes that makes a certain amount of sense. It's partly Hannibal's own arrogance, and partly that this is not the time to show any weakness. Hannibal is polite, but Will can tell from his tone that he's not giving an inch.

Will putters around the shop, not sure what he's looking for, until he is. He goes back to Hannibal and makes a few gestures to ask 'how long is this going to take?' Hannibal just rolls his eyes, barks something down the phone then mouths, 'Go,' at Will.

So Will leaves the dogs futzing around outside the store and jogs about a mile to the nearest CVS. He never comes here, it's full of tourists and people stare at his face, at the scar he can manage to forget about sometimes, so long as he doesn't smile. His heart hammers in his chest, like everyone he can see knows who he is, who he's harbouring. He shouldn't have left Hannibal alone, Will thinks, that was stupid. It's too late now.

He grabs lube and condoms - a little late to worry about STDs but it'll make quickies easier if they don't have to worry about the mess - and doesn't make eye contact with the kid behind the counter when he pays for them. He stuffs them both into his pants and doesn't jog on his way back, he runs.

It's maybe twenty minutes, tops, there and back and Will is sweating through his shirt not just from the heat, but from the absolute terror that he's going to come back to police cars and body bags.

Hannibal is standing outside the store, sharing a cigarette with Kayla who is standing inappropriately close. Will whistles for his dogs and Kayla jumps, guilty.

"Your dad know about the smokes?" Will asks Kayla. She manages to look even more guilty.

"You aren't going to tell, are you?" she asks.

"He ain't gon' tell." Hannibal plucks it cigarette from Kayla's fingers and takes a drag before dropping it in the dirt and grinding it out under his boot. "See you 'round, cher," he says in his terrible Cajun accent and follows Will back to the boat, the dogs leaping around as though they weren't just out on the water.

Will waits until they're away from the dock. "What the hell do you think you're doing?" he demands. He's still winded, sweat cooling on his face and sticking his shirt to his back.

Hannibal's expression is extremely displeased and his tongue comes out to wet his lips as though he's trying to get rid of a foul taste. "Will Graham's out of town friend is a full-fledged personality who makes overtures to teenage girls, smokes whatever that horrible filth was, left the police force because he prefers bringing in the bad guys to giving speeding tickets, and who is here partially as a favour and partially because he's chasing a bond breaker. That's who people will remember, not just some out of towner who appeared and disappeared shortly after Hannibal Lecter escaped."

What's annoying is that Hannibal is right, and Will can't think of a good reason to yell at him, other than that he's afraid. He's afraid they'll get caught. He's afraid Hannibal will choose suicide by cop rather than go back to the hospital. He's afraid of what Hannibal will do next, and the choices he still has to make. Everything about their situation is overwhelming.

"Dare I ask where you went?" Hannibal says. His hair is escaping the tie and flicks around his face in the wind. The dye is fading out. Already Will can see streaks of ash blond and grey.

Will takes deep breaths and pushes the fear back down. "Not yet," he says. He makes Hannibal wait until they're back on his property, safe inside where no one can see them.

While Hannibal pries his boots off, Will tosses his purchase on the bed and strips off his shirt. "What's the plan?" he calls out, using his shirt to wipe himself off. He leans in the doorway and watches Hannibal straighten up, enjoying the view.

Hannibal's face softens. "I have to leave tomorrow," he says. "The rendezvous is in Texas and if I want to make it on time, I shall have to leave tomorrow morning." The unspoken question hangs in the air; will he be going alone?

"It's lube," Will blurts out. He crowds Hannibal, pushing him backwards into the bedroom. Hannibal tastes of cheap tobacco and Will licks it from his mouth. "That's what I got us." He pulls open Hannibal's jeans with more force than necessary. "Let me fuck you again." It's not really a request.

Hannibal shudders against him and swallows hard enough Will can hear it. His hands are clumsy on Will's belt. "Anything," he says. He pulls away, taking off his own shirt and kicking off his jeans.

Will struggles with his own pants and shoes, watching as Hannibal gets into the bed, still a mess of towels and dirty sheets. He's down to his boxers when Hannibal coats two of his own

fingers in lube and pushes them into himself.

"Jesus Christ," Will says. Will can't see Hannibal's face from this angle but his shoulders are bunched with the effort and he makes a hoarse, choked sound. No sooner is Will on the bed then Hannibal is on his elbows and knees, both hands gripping the sheets, forehead pressed to the backs of his wrists.

Will sighs. "I'm going to blame this on the withdrawal and the mood swings," he says. He smoothes his hands up the back of Hannibal's thighs and hips. "Otherwise I'd have to be insulted that you think I'd use this as leverage. Me coming with you is not contingent on getting to fuck you."

Hannibal looks back over his shoulder, mouth set in a hard line and something equal parts young and terrified and old and cruel in his eyes. Will leans over and kisses him. "I'd *like* to fuck you," he says. "But if you're going to be an ass about it..."

"Don't be ridiculous," Hannibal says. "I told you I wanted-"

Will, crouched over Hannibal, is in just the right position to push his dick into Hannibal, cutting him off. Hannibal's eyes squeeze shut and his breath is punched out of him on a groan. "What would I do here without you?" Will says, mouth pressed to Hannibal's ear. "Trying to manipulate me, telling me what to do." He bites at the hinge of Hannibal's jaw. "So how do you want it?"

Hannibal twists onto his side, one knee bent up towards his chest. Will rocks into him in short, sharp little movements. He can see it, the lack of control Hannibal is feeling, never knowing when his body will betray him, waiting out the hormonal fluctuations. Under that is the old hurt of his body being used, his inability to fight back. How they took that from him again. He can see the loneliness Hannibal didn't even know he felt until they were stuck in the cell together. He can see his own fear of being alone reflected back. And he can see how endless and dark Hannibal's feelings run. Perhaps it's love. Perhaps it's obsession.

Will kisses him again, shifting so he can get an arm under Hannibal's knee and really leverage his thrusts. Hannibal grabs him around the shoulders.

"I'm not going to break," Hannibal snaps. "Do it properly." His voice cracks, harsh guttural sounds pulled out of him, as Will figures out the right angle to hit his prostate.

"When they stop looking for us," Will says, panting with effort. "I want you to take me to Europe. Take me to Rome, and Paris, and Athens. I want to do all the tourist stuff, and take bad selfies with you in front of famous monuments. Then we can see all the hidden things, all the real parts of the cities. I'll let you fuck me any way you want, all that weird shit you said before. We can do that. I'll let you."

Hannibal presses his face into the pillow, bites at his own wrist. Will knows what he's doing probably feels overwhelming: too full, too hard, too much stimulation on Hannibal's prostate. He gets a hand on Hannibal's cock and rubs his thumb around the slit. No one has ever done this to Hannibal - filled him up with so much, all of them good things, together almost

overwhelming - not with sex. Hannibal's whole body shakes and he's cursing in three different languages.

"Is this good?" Will asks, partly to be a dick, partly because he wants to check.

"Yes," Hannibal manages, pulling Will's hair until he's close enough to kiss. He's shifting against Will, like he's trying to get away, like he's trying to get closer and Will leaves bite marks up and down his throat and tells him how fucking good they'll be together.

Will comes first, Hannibal tight and hot around him. Then he shoulders Hannibal onto his stomach and licks at his hole. It's the first time he's done it, and mostly he can taste lube and his own come. It's weird, and a little gross, but Hannibal seems to like it. He eats Hannibal out until Hannibal grinds down against the sheets and back into Will's mouth, and comes. Will knows better than to just leave him there, so he crawls up over him, sweaty and heavy, and lies mostly on top of Hannibal until their breathing evens out.

“Ça vas?” Will says.

“Oui, ça vas,” Hannibal replies. "I really should learn to trust your empathy."

Will grins and gets up. "Yeah, probably," he says. He rinses out his mouth, gets them water and brings back towels for them both.

"I'll come with you," Will says, while Hannibal drinks, propped up on the pillows. "And I won't ask you to stop, or change who you are. But I want you to change your criteria - kill people who really deserve it."

"I'm not a vigilante," Hannibal says, distain dripping from his tone.

"I know," Will says. "Relationships are about compromise. Besides, wouldn't it be more challenging to hunt other apex predators, instead of sheep?"

Hannibal frowns into the glass. "Perhaps," he says. He lets Will pat him down with a towel, wiping away the sweat, and lube, and come.

"Don't consider it a compromise," Will says, getting back into the bed. It's such a wreck. They should have used a condom. He's almost glad they've only got one more night in it. "I'm asking you, because you love me, to do this."

He can see Hannibal's desire to argue, to ask how Will is so sure that he loves him. Will can also see the moment Hannibal realises it's stupid to argue.

"What if I want something in return?" Hannibal says.

Will wasn't expecting it to be easy. "What?" he asks suspiciously.

Hannibal pretends to think about it, but it's obvious he already knows what he wants. Will waits patiently for Hannibal to finish the glass of water, but when he's done he just lies back and stares up at the ceiling fan turning lazily overhead.

"God damn it, Hannibal," Will says.

Hannibal sighs. "I want you to come with me. Hunting," he says, in the tones of a man who knows he's asking for too much, already resigned to renegotiation. "I want to see your face when you kill someone."

"Not just the once, I'm guessing," Will says.

"No," Hannibal says softly. "I think I could watch that for the rest of my life."

Will can read him like a book. Hannibal thinks this might ruin them; that Will expects him to be something he isn't, and when he tries, he'll become frustrated and resentful. He thinks perhaps Will, eventually, will decide he no longer wants to be with a killer, the memory of his own murders slipping into the past. And then, like any other relationship in such unhappy straits, theirs will sour. Of course, unlike other relationships this one can never end amicably.

"You find them," Will says. "I have to approve them."

Hannibal's head snaps up. "I beg your pardon?" he says.

"Murderers, rapists, child abusers," Will says. "I doubt you'll have trouble finding people who fit the criteria. We can draw up a list later."

"And..." Hannibal's voice is flat, his face without expression. He won't hope.

"And I'll come with you, on your hunts I mean," Will says. "You break the agreement, you break my trust-"

"I won't," Hannibal says breathlessly. He takes Will's face in his hands and kisses him. "I swear to you, I won't."

Chapter 27

Once Hannibal is asleep, Will lets the puppies into the bed, warm squirming bodies that pile around Hannibal, tucked into the curve of his body, pressed against his back. Ed makes a space for himself on the pillow above Hannibal's head, curling up like a very strange hat. He doesn't have a phone to take a picture with, but he has a second-hand Canon which he uses.

He keeps half an ear out while he packs, in case Hannibal has more nightmares, but only hears Gene snoring. Will doesn't have a lot of things to put in order. His clothes go into a duffle. His handgun goes into its case, the rifle he leaves where it is. He sticks some food in his cooler for the trip and digs up an out-of-date road map of the states.

Hannibal's car is a station wagon, decent mileage, spare tyre in the back. Not pretty, not by any stretch of the imagination, but it'll do. There's a pink slip in the glovebox and Hannibal's too smart to be driving a stolen car, so Will figures it's probably a better bet than his car, registered in his name. He takes the plates off his own car anyway and puts them in with the rest of his belongings. Their duffles go on the floor in the back and then he lays the backseat down. There's not a lot of room for the dogs. They should take both cars.

They shouldn't be doing this at all. Will shouldn't be doing this, shouldn't even be thinking about it. The feeling in his gut isn't entirely fearful. It's more like the moment before the rollercoaster starts the first plunge. It's excitement, more than anything. Will sits on the porch and watches the water, too restless to go back inside for fear he'll wake Hannibal up with his pacing. He's not sure how long he sits there before his dogs pile out, some dashing across the sand, a few sticking by him.

"You need passports for them," Hannibal says, nodding at the dogs.

Will nearly jumps out of his skin. "Make some noise, would you?" he complains.

Hannibal hands him a cup of coffee. "And you may only take two animals over the border. You have seven." There is a note of disapproval in his voice. Will elects to ignore it.

"Well we'll figure that out later," he says. "You got all your shit?"

"Not quite," Hannibal says. Will follows him back into the house and discovers that Hannibal has practically emptied the fridge making food for the road. Hannibal takes the cooler out to the car while Will stands in the living room of his house and takes one last look around. He finds he is not sentimental about the house that he built. Part of him thought that he might be, but no. Everything he cares about is already in the car, waiting for him. He screws his courage to the sticking place and doesn't look back.

Will piles any blankets that aren't covered in bodily fluids into the back of the car and whistles for the dogs. It's a little cramped, but not too bad; Beans and her pups aren't especially big.

Hannibal starts the car and turns to look at Will. "Last chance," he says.

It startles a laugh out of Will. "You'd never let me go," he says. "I thought we weren't lying to each other."

Hannibal puts the car in drive and heads for the highway. "Perhaps I could have left without you." He doesn't sound sure.

"And perhaps you'd leave without me, with my body cooling on the kitchen floor," Will says. "You're a lot of things, Hannibal, and forgiving isn't one of them." He leans over and turns the radio on. Classical music. Not a big surprise. "But I'm here, so..."

It's thirty-three hours to Fort Stockton in Texas. They drive in three hour increments, parking at rest stops for a half hour to let the dogs run around. Will catches a few moments of sleep when he isn't behind the wheel, but it's restless and full of nightmares. Twice Hannibal shakes him awake.

Will reassures himself that there is no need to worry yet. No one will come looking for Will, not right away at least.

"They're looking for me in Miami," Hannibal remarks about ten hours into their trip, out of the blue, while he's unpacking sandwiches. "Close to you, but also to Cuba."

"Miami? Why wasn't there someone watching my house?" Will asks.

Hannibal taps his fingers against the cooler. "There was," he says after a moment's pause. "They found his body in Miami. Which is why they're looking for me there."

Will can't do anything but keep driving. "You kidnapped a local cop and took him to Miami?"

"I took a federal agent, led him away from your house so there was a traceable trail, *then* I kidnapped him, and took him to Miami." Hannibal looks offended at Will's suggestion. "I've been doing this for a very long time. This is not, as they say, my first rodeo."

Will grips the steering wheel and reminds himself that this is the bed he has chosen to lie in. "I'm not going to talk to you for a little bit," he says at last. "I know you were protecting us, but I can't be happy about this."

Hannibal puts the cooler in the back. "I see," he says.

Will has no emotional investment in some stranger he never met. He can easily imagine Hannibal's actions, but he can't rouse the appropriate empathy for the stranger who died so they could escape. He's too busy feeling relieved that Hannibal has kept them safe.

"I'm not mad at you," he says. "I'm a little disgusted with myself, but I'm not actually mad at you."

Hannibal finishes chewing and sets the sandwich down on the waxed paper it was wrapped in. "I see," he says again.

"If you try to psychoanalyse me I'll push you out of the car," Will says. "That goes double if you ask me how I feel."

"I don't need to ask," Hannibal says. "You feel guilty for not feeling guilty. It's perfectly natural. Human beings aren't designed to care about people who aren't part of our own tribe. In theory, of course, but not in the same way that we care for those we know. You were visibly less upset when I said it was FBI and not a local police officer."

"You're not making me feel better," Will mutters.

Hannibal sighs. "I made you a promise," he says. "But I will not hesitate to kill those who threaten our safely. Don't ask me for that."

By the time they reach Fort Stockton, thirty-four hours later, the dogs are restless, Will's legs and hips are killing him from all the sitting, but Hannibal is stone-faced and determined. If he's achy, or tired, he's not showing it.

Hannibal books a motel room and they drive around so no one sees seven dogs and two men are sharing a one-occupant space.

"Go, run the dogs," Hannibal says. "I have calls to make."

Will comes back when the dogs are worn out, his legs are shaking, and his breath burns his throat. Hannibal's on him the second the door is locked. The dogs ignore them both as Hannibal drags Will into the shower, leaving a trail of clothing behind them on the ugly carpet. He fucks Will bareback, practically holding him up, Will's legs are so tired. He has one arm looped across Will's chest, hand covering his mouth, the other hard across Will's hips.

Will braces against the slippery tiles, eyes screwed shut against the water. Hannibal hardly pulls out at all, cock so far inside Will feels like he might split in two.

When the water starts to run cold, and Will's starting to slip, he half-carries Will over to the bed, pushes him down on the coverlet, and keeps fucking him until Will is making enough noise to make the occupants of the adjoining room bang on the wall. By the time he finally lets Will come, Will's so exhausted he almost falls asleep as Hannibal finishes, despite the vicious bite marks Hannibal's leaving up and down his back. But then, when they're lying in bed together, Hannibal's still a live wire of tension and Will can't help but react, his own nerves waking back up.

"I'll meet you in Ciudad Juárez in five days, at the motel on Durango under the name Crawford," Hannibal says, running a thumb over the worst of the bites he left on Will's back. "If I'm not there, I want you to take your dogs, get in the car, and go back to Sugarloaf."

"Why?" Will asks. He's so tired he can taste it, but he can't sleep.

"If I'm not there, then I'm dead." Hannibal is matter of fact about it. Will wants to hit him.

"If you let some cartel kill you, I'll never forgive you," Will says. He's sore and sitting's going to be uncomfortable, and he just knows Hannibal did that on purpose. If he knows Hannibal at all, and he likes to think he does, then at least one of those bite marks is going to scar.

Hannibal cards his hand through Will's hair and makes a non-committal sound. "I'll do my utmost," he says, then, like an afterthought, "I'm not afraid to die, Will. Don't be afraid on my behalf."

Will presses his fists against his closed eyes so hard he sees a kaleidoscope pattern. "I'm not afraid on your behalf," he says between clenched teeth. "But you can't work so hard to make us...this-" He waves a hand to indicate whatever 'this' is between them - "and then abandon me again."

Hannibal doesn't have an answer for that.

In the morning, neither of them have really slept. The harsh light in the bathroom makes them both look old and disreputable. Every inch of Will hurts. He takes no comfort in the pained tension in Hannibal's shoulders. They don't have the luxury of a plan B. This is it.

Hannibal goes to the nearest shady car dealership and picks up a piece of shit four-door for five hundred dollars cash. It makes Will feel sick to his stomach, every moment Hannibal is out there without him, but of the two of them he has the more memorable face now.

"Ciudad Juárez in five days, at the motel on Durango under the name Crawford," Hannibal repeats when he returns to their room. He holds Will at arm's length as though he's memorizing every detail.

Will pulls him into an embrace that he tells himself isn't desperate. "We won't get caught," Will says, though he's not sure he believes it. "You won't get caught. You better not get caught you prick." Will lets him go.

Dry as a desert, Hannibal says, "I can't. You've been swearing at me for days now and don't think I haven't been keeping count."

Will's laugh is a little hysterical. "You better fucking keep that promise," he says.

Hannibal cups his cheek, thumb tracing over the scar, and then he walks to the car and drives off before Will can say anything else.

The dogs whine, circling around him, bumping his hands with their noses. "Yeah," Will says to them. "I know."

He can't worry about Hannibal without losing his mind, so he elects to worry about the dogs instead. He can't bear to leave any of them behind, which really only leaves him one option. Will gets them back in the station wagon and heads for San Diego. It takes two days and by the end of it Will's long past sleep-deprived; manic and exhausted by turns. He sleeps in snatches in rest stops, eats the last of the food Hannibal packed and then lives off gas-station energy drinks, bad coffee, and anything with sugar in it.

The San Ysidro Port of Entry is the busiest border crossing in the world. He's one of a thousand cars. If there's one thing Will has learned from his years of law enforcement is that it's easier to hide out in a big city than it is in the country. No one remembers one face in a city where no one is local. The plan is simple. Bullshit his way through and if that doesn't

work, play the idiot. "Sorry officer, I didn't know pets needed passports. Ain't that just the damndest thing. Sorry for wasting your time." Go back to San Diego and figure something else out.

Will's hands are shaking, his teeth hurt from grinding them. He's unkempt and suspicious-looking. He pulls over at a fast food restaurant and changes into a clean t-shirt, throwing a button-down on over it, collar slightly popped. He slicks his hair back. He still looks exhausted.

Will goes to the nearest CVS and picks up concealer which he uses under his eyes. He puts the seat back up and has the dogs lie down in the footwells of the backseat, the little ones in the back amongst the duffles. They're not hidden, by any stretch of the imagination, but they're a little less obvious.

It takes half an hour to get through the line and by the time it's his turn, Will's heart is pounding. He hands over his passport to the border guard who looks at him, looks at the passport, looks at him.

"What's your purpose for travelling to Mexico?" the guard says. It's a busy day. It's always a busy day and he's not concerned about one white American travelling into Mexico.

"I needed a holiday," Will says in a flat Midwestern accent and gestures at his own face. "Finally healed enough to get some sun." In the back the dogs lie quietly. Silently. His scar commands all the attention. Will tries not to hold his breath. He channels the casual air of someone boring, someone forgettable.

"You wanna tell me why your hands are so shaky?" the guard asks.

Will glances at his hand. It's pretty bad. He puts on a defiant expression. "Iraq," he says shortly.

The guard nods sympathetically, a little embarrassed. "Sorry, brother. Thanks for your service." Some idiot honks their horn and he frowns, distracted.

"Figured I'd hit the beach for a week. Relax. Drink some tequila." Will presses on as though he doesn't want to talk about his hands or his face. "Don't know shit about the area though. There somewhere I can go that isn't full of college kids?"

The guard laughs. "Not on the Tijuana beaches, not at this time of year."

More honking. Will bets a strip-search is in someone's future, but he wants to get out and thank that idiot and his impatience because the border patrol isn't looking into his backseat, he's trying to spot the honker.

"Yeah, cool man. Have fun." He hands Will's passport back and waves Will through, not even bothering to meet his eye.

Will drives until he's away from the border, gets out of the car and staggers away from the road. His whole body is shaking. He puts his hands on his knees and bends over, but he

doesn't throw up. When he feels steady enough to stand without falling over, Will puts the seat back down for the dogs and gets back into the car.

"Oh my god," he says, laughing. "Jesus fuck." The dogs look at him, confused, sick of being in the car. "I think that's the most insane thing I've ever tried, smuggling dogs, what the fuck is my life? I killed a man in prison and this is still the stupidest thing."

He wraps his shaky hands around the wheel and turns the car towards Ciudad Juárez. It's another two days' drive and just the thought makes him want to scream.

The drive isn't enough to distract him, now. All he can do is hope that everything goes smoothly with the cartel, because he doesn't know what he'll do if Hannibal isn't there. God, what if Hannibal *isn't* there? What if something else goes wrong? Hannibal Lecter might be the devil, but even his luck can't last forever. Sooner or later, it's going to run out.

Chapter 28

Will gets to the motel in Ciudad Juárez without too much trouble and is given a room key by a guy who speaks less English than Will speaks Spanish. He wants to ask if he's the first one there, or if someone else has checked in. He tries, but gives up when they're mostly just shrugging and uming and ahing at one another.

There aren't any other cars outside the room.

Will swallows down the nausea and opens the door.

Hannibal is sitting on one of the beds and Will's legs nearly go out from under him.

Hannibal is clean-shaven, hair cut and slicked back. He's in a summer-weight suit, jacket on the back of a chair, shirt sleeves rolled up. There are cuts on his knuckles, he has a gash under one eye and a split lip but he's sitting on one of the beds, barefoot, drinking expensive wine out of a plastic cup and watching a telenovela with an expression that is somewhere between rapt, and horrified.

He looks up when the door opens. "I see you got the dogs through," he says as they spill into the room jumping up for him to pet them, like smuggling himself over the border was nothing at all. "Go take a shower, you look dreadful."

Will smells like four days on the road. He's so tired he can barely see. It's entirely possible that if he tries to speak he'll start laughing or crying. "We made it," he says anyway and shuts the door. He's shaking again, so hard his teeth are chattering and his eyes are watering. "Oh my god, you made it."

He has to sit down to take off his shoes, for fear of falling, and he stays down as he strips out of his clothes. It seems too much effort to get up, so he crawls over to the bed, pressing his face to the mattress next to Hannibal's thigh.

Hannibal cards a hand through his hair, lank and unwashed as it is. "My darling boy," he says. "Come up here."

Will puts in one final burst of energy and moves onto the bed, in the space Hannibal makes for him, already warm from Hannibal's body. He pulls Will close and kisses his mouth. Will clutches Hannibal's shirt, wrinkling it, and rests his forehead on Hannibal's shoulder, trying to get a grip on his emotions. Hannibal smells like aftershave and wine and he looks wholly himself. Maybe this is who he is when no one's looking: a small god wandering the earth, watching the world like a science experiment.

Hannibal gently pushes him so he's tucked under the sheet, his head on Hannibal's thigh. "We'll talk later," Hannibal says, turning the sound on the television down. "Go to sleep." His hand is heavy and warm on Will's head, rubbing gentle circles with his fingertips, massaging away the headache Will's has had for three days.

He's not sure how many hours it is later when he wakes up, but Hannibal is putting his shoes on. It's dark outside, and the lights from a car are breaking through the drawn curtains. He can hear an engine running outside their room.

"There's food in the refrigerator," Hannibal says without looking up. "Eat something. Shower. Help yourself to the wine, it's surprisingly palatable."

"High praise," Will says with a yawn. "Where are you going?"

"To repay my debt," Hannibal says. He stands, sliding his jacket on. "I imagine this will take some time, but I'll be here when you wake up tomorrow."

Will's head feels like it's been stuffed full of cotton wool. His eyes are gummy and he needs to brush his teeth. He can smell himself. "I'm coming with you," he says. "Wasn't that the plan anyway?"

"Not this time," Hannibal says. "I want you as far away from these people as possible."

"If they're so dangerous, shouldn't you have backup?" Will asks.

Hannibal smiles at him fondly. "Will, they outnumber us by the thousands. Your presence would not even the odds. I will go where I need to go, kill the man I need to kill, and then return. Tomorrow we will drive south and start making our plans as to where we would like to go."

Will reminds himself that Hannibal could be the poster boy for people with control issues. He's got to be so far out of his comfort zone that he might as well be in another galaxy.

Hannibal is distracted, Will can tell. He kisses Will goodbye, but he's not paying attention. The door shuts behind him and Will lunges for the window. He watches the car for the make and model. Remembers the plate number and watches as it turns out of the motel parking lot so he has a vague idea of where it's going.

As soon as it's out of sight, Will grabs the neatly folded stack of clothing on the chair. They're the clothes he left on the floor, so they're still dirty and wrinkled but trust Hannibal to fold laundry. The dogs are looking at him and Will suddenly has a revelation: he was so worried about getting them across the border he completely forgot that he'd had a gun in the car as well. It's still in his duffle. Will loads it, puts on his belt holster and throws on a jacket over it. Hannibal's knives are sitting neatly in his duffle so Will grabs those as well and he's out in the station wagon barely a minute after Hannibal leaves.

He has no real idea where Hannibal has gone, but he has a cop's instincts and he knows what the car looks like. After circling the nearby blocks for a half hour, he sees the car again. Four unfriendly faces stare at him when he pulls up and rolls his window down.

"I'm Miticacituaul," he says. "Where's Hannibal Lecter?"

"Mictecacihuatl?" the driver asks, suspicious.

"Whatever," Will says. "I'm his backup."

There's a moment of debate in the other car. "That's not the deal," the driver says.

"Yeah, well, you've got more of a chance at getting what you want if I'm there to make sure he hasn't been shot to death." Will says. "And trust me, you do not want to get in my way."

More debate and then he's given the address where they sent Hannibal. Will parks a block away and considers his options. One handgun is not going to do much if there are a dozen guys with machine guns. If he's going in, he has to go in smart. It's possible that it's all gone to plan and Hannibal is just taking his time with his victim. Will's not counting on that.

There are two guys guarding the door.

Will's pretty sure it didn't go to plan.

Will circles around the house. The windows have security bars on them; the only way in is through the front door. He jogs back to the car, grabs a map out of the glove compartment and fishes out some old headphones someone left in there. Will sticks one earbud in, and tucks the plug into his pocket.

"No," he says, walking down the street, staring at the map. "I know how to read a map...don't give me that, you're the one who can't- baby, no. That's not what I was...baby, that's not what I'm saying. I'm just saying that I'm looking at the map and it's not where you said. This isn't right. Hang on, there's some guys here."

Will waves his map at the guys guarding the front door.

"Let me just ask these guys, hang on."

He comes up the stairs, all apology. "Comprende English?" he asks and then, without waiting for an answer, shoves the map at the first guy. "I'm trying to get here," he says, jabbing a finger at the page, "but I'm so turned around."

"Hey pendejo," the guy says, trying to push the map away. "This is private proper-"

Will cuts his throat. It's easier than he thought it would be. The blood gets everywhere, and his hand slips on the hilt of the knife, but he manages to stab the second guy in the neck, severing his vocal cords, before he can shout. It doesn't kill him right away, but it shuts him up.

Will drags both bodies off the porch to the shadows at the side of the house. If anyone has seen what he's doing, they're staying inside, and staying out of it. The second man is still alive, blood bubbling up out of his mouth. Will cuts his throat properly. They're both carrying guns. He takes them, one in his jacket pocket, the other down the back of his jeans.

The front door isn't locked and it opens silently. Will creeps in, the bad feeling growing when he smells blood. More blood, rather, than what's on him already.

There's a body on the floor, head almost totally severed, the machete still stuck into the floor on one side. Will steps around it and follows the familiar scent of crime scenes into the kitchen.

In the kitchen there is a metric fuck-ton of cocaine, much of it spoiled by blood cast off. Another body is tied face up to the kitchen table and there are distinct signs of torture. It's the usual gang stuff, nothing fancier than damage to the feet and hands so far, but it's very precise. Will's spent so many years looking at Ripper crime scenes he's developed a sixth sense about them. This is Hannibal's work.

Cause of death appears to be a broken neck, which is odd.

Will lets the pendulum swing.

I don't want to be here. Already things aren't going to plan. There are two men in the house instead of one. I dispatch one quickly, before he can aim his gun. I dash his head into the wall and he drops at my feet. They've given me a machete and I use it to sever his head.

I dislike the mess but this is not about what I want.

The other man, the man I have been sent to kill - like some common lackey - sees me. He is too afraid to run. I subdue him with relative ease, binding him to the table. I tell him that I cannot be bargained with, cannot be bought, and that I don't care about any secrets he has. I am there to torture him and kill him. I gag him with a dish towel but he tries to plead with my regardless.

I break the little bones in his hands and feet with a meat tenderizer. He tries to scream. I should enjoy his suffering, but I don't. This isn't my design. I am deciding what to do next when I am ambushed. More men, these ones with guns. I threaten my captive, their friend's life. I threaten to break his neck if they don't let me leave.

They will not let me leave. I break his neck.

They grab me, drag me...

Where? Will asks himself, coming out of it. Somewhere, someone has Hannibal. They wouldn't risk moving him around. He's dangerous and any idiot can see that. The basement.

A door sitting slightly ajar seems to be what Will is looking for. He sidles up and listens. No one is waiting at the top, so he opens the door just wide enough to get through.

He can hear men arguing with one another. Will crouches down and peers through the riser. The scene is upside down, but better than not seeing.

Three men and Hannibal. Hannibal has been stripped down to his shorts, hands bound with rope and tied to an overhead beam so his feet barely touch the ground. He's bleeding from the nose and mouth but all his fingers and toes are at the right angles.

"You think we wouldn't hear you were coming, Mictlantecuhtli?" one voice says, dripping with derision. "No one moves on us like that."

When Hannibal doesn't answer, they strike him with something that whistles thinly though the air and comes down against the backs of Hannibal's knees with an audible crack.

Hannibal's breath comes out of him in a hard rush but he doesn't cry out. "I'm sorry," he says. "I wasn't aware I needed to answer rhetorical questions."

They strike him again. Again, he doesn't do much to indicate they're hurting him.

"My congratulations on an effective communications network?" Hannibal says.

There aren't any windows Will can see. No way in or out except for this one staircase. All the guns are stacked in the far corner, out of Hannibal's line of sight and as far away from him as they can possibly be. Will's not sure what they expect him to do with his hands tied over his head, but they're certainly not underestimating Hannibal.

"Where's your little faggot FBI wife?" the man asks. Will's heard more flattering descriptions of himself.

Hannibal cocks his head to the side like an animal. "Who?" he says and takes another hit. "Somewhere in the United States," Hannibal says. "Beyond that, I'm afraid I don't-"

This time they hit him hard enough that he loses his balance, hanging entirely by his wrists, a low grunt punched out of him. Hannibal gets his feet back under himself with effort.

"He is not here," Hannibal says. "And were he to venture to this squalid neighbourhood, I don't understand why you imagine he would be any threat to you."

"Tell you what, Lecter," the man says, getting just close enough to be intimidating, not so close that Hannibal can kick him or bite him. "You tell me where he is, and we'll put a bullet in his head, nice and quick. You make us find him, and we'll rape him to death in front of you. Then we'll kill you to and leave you both out as a warning. You don't fuck with us."

Hannibal sighs, as though the whole discussion is tedious. "I'm a sadist, Señor," he says. "I enjoy the pain and suffering of others. Even if you did find Will-"

Will scoots backwards into the kitchen and stands up. They're going to spend at least another few minutes trying to beat the information out of Hannibal and so long as they're all occupied...

He rifles through the contents of the kitchen and comes up with the usual household products. There's enough variety for him to make a semi-decent smoke grenade.

When he peers back into the basement, Hannibal is hanging from the chains again. He's twisted so Will can see his back and his knees are already a swollen mess. There's blood trickling from some stripes across his back.

Will takes careful aim, drops the glass jar he's using as a canister and pulls the trigger twice. One man down, hit square in the chest, the other probably just injured, and the room is filling with semi-toxic smoke. There's swearing and a strangled gagging sound. Someone fires a handgun in Will's general direction. He waits until they're done and then fires back in the direction of the muzzle flash.

Will moves down the stairs as fast as he can. The towel wrapped around his face will only work for so long. Already his eyes are starting to burn.

There is a little window, as it turns out, hidden from where Will had been sitting. He breaks the glass and the smoke begins to dissipate. Through the noxious clouds he can see the man he injured trying to get up. He puts two more rounds in the guy.

Hannibal has the third man subdued, legs around his throat, choking him out. He's holding his breath, eyes barely open, and it has to be hurting him, hanging from already bloody wrists.

Will says, "I've got it," and Hannibal lets go. As soon as the man is clear of Hannibal, stumbling forwards nearly unconscious, Will shoots him too.

Hannibal smiles at him, blood on his teeth. "My dear Will," he starts and has to stop so he can cough. One of his legs will hold him, the other will not. He leans heavily on Will, while trying valiantly not to. "I knew you would be magnificent."

"Save it," Will says, sawing at the rope with his knife. "Where are your pants? We need to walk back to the car and get the fuck out of here."

"I'm afraid I lost track," Hannibal says, coughing so hard he can't breathe.

"Wait in the motel, he says. I'll be back soon, he says. You fucking liar." Will saws through the last knot and Hannibal collapses into his arms. "You have to walk, I can't carry you," he says.

Hannibal climbs the stairs with Will's help, though it has to be causing him significant pain. He's still wheezing a little from the smoke, but that should clear up soon enough. "I told you not to come," Hannibal says as Will helps him dress. His knees won't bend.

Will takes two bags of frozen vegetables from the freezer of the kitchen and the roll of duct tape Hannibal used to tie his target to the table with. They can use it to bring the swelling down once Hannibal's in the car.

"We don't always get what we want," Will says. "This isn't a dictatorship. And, really, at this point, a thank you would be nice."

Hannibal, one arm slung over Will's shoulder, pauses before they can leave the house. He kisses Will, gently, almost sweetly. There are seven bodies lying around the property and Hannibal kisses him like they're already walking the banks of the Seine after a late dinner. "Thank you," he says.

"I want to see the pyramids," Will says. "I want to shower, eat something, and get the fuck out of here. And then I want you to take me to Teoihuacan, Chichen Itza, and Palenque."

"Probably we should leave town first," Hannibal says as they start walking.

"Fine," Will says. "Get the dogs, leave town, find somewhere to stay that won't give us shit for having seven dogs, I'm going to shower, and then you're getting in the bathtub and soaking your knees while we fuck. Then we eat. Then...whatever."

Hannibal laughs, coughs, and keeps laughing through the coughing fit. "Anything you want," he says.

Chapter 29

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

They evade Interpol in Costa Rica without any deaths and after that they take turns choosing where to go based off the flip of a coin. It makes their pattern harder to predict. It's Will's turn, and they're renting a place in Santos, Sao Paulo. Will likes it because there's a beach and he can take a boat out. Hannibal likes it because there's a lot to see and do in the city, and they both like it because there's a shitload of people, so they don't stick out.

Will is snoozing on the deck, book open in his lap but he wakes up when Sadie starts yipping excitedly. She has decided that Hannibal is her favourite and follows him everywhere. She sulks when he leaves. She sits with her head on his lap whenever she possibly can. Will can't really begrudge her the feeling. So it's no surprise when Hannibal rounds the side of the house, still walking stiffly. The brace on his left knee will come off next week, now that his ruptured Achilles tendon isn't hurting so much. He has a sheaf of papers in his hand.

"Terrorist cells in Canada, martial law in the States, beheadings, Justin Beiber leaked a sex tape," Will says in lieu of a hello, waving a lazy hand at the computer they use to check the news. "No one's talking about us anymore. The closest reference was Freddie Lounds wondering if the FBI's closure rate was suffering because their resident psychopath was on holiday with Hannibal the Cannibal. But that was more about criticising the director than anything else."

Hannibal nudges Will forward on the deck chair so he can sit and Will can lean back on him. "Where are we on the most wanted?"

Will doesn't mention the fact that Hannibal is absent-mindedly scratching Sadie behind the ears."Pretty low. We don't rank anywhere near war criminals and terrorists. And they know we're not in the country. We're someone else's problem now." Will turns his head and kisses the underside of Hannibal's jaw. "What're the papers?"

Hannibal hands them to him and Will flips through a series of photographs, web search results, and other profile details. "Who's this?" he asks, although he's got a pretty good idea already. The focus is on a man in his late mid forties and the profile Hannibal has put together is fairly damning: secret sadist passing unseen amongst his peers.

"We shared a waitress at that coffee house I like. He was so unpleasant to her that the service she gave her other customers, myself included, suffered." Hannibal has both hands on Will now, one against his side, one tucked under his shirt, resting low on his stomach.

"Uh huh," Will says, waiting.

Hannibal sighs. "He also enjoys murdering rent boys, which you can see I have ascertained without a doubt."

It's the bargain they made, that Will made and it seems a little late to complain about the difference between pre-meditated murder and the seven people he's already killed. One of which, if he's honest, was pre-meditated. He tosses the file onto the deck beside them. Ed and Gene immediately come over to investigate and start chewing on the paper. That's one way to dispose of the evidence, Will supposes.

"Tonight?" Will asks, mostly just agreeing that he'll come with Hannibal.

"Tonight," Hannibal says, breathless. He pulls Will's t-shirt up and off, leaving bites and kisses all along his shoulders.

Will shucks his shorts off, Hannibal's cock sliding hot and wet between his cheeks. He hasn't bothered getting undressed; Will can feel Hannibal's slacks against his bare skin. The idea that Hannibal's sitting there, fully dressed with just his cock out makes something go tight and liquid at the same time in his stomach. He slings an arm back, getting a grip on Hannibal's hair as Hannibal jerks him, his hips rolling back. Hannibal's breath is loud in his ear, teeth sharp on his neck.

Neither of them last especially long and when they're done, Will is sweaty and covered in come. He doesn't protest even a little bit when Hannibal drags him into the shower.

Hannibal makes them an early dinner and they're out the door by the time the sun goes down. God only knows where he got them from, but Hannibal's managed to procure two full body suits as a forensic counter measure.

Will pulls his on in the car. "We are going to be swimming in sweat by the time we're done," Will complains. "This is so unnecessary. The cops here don't care. There's too many murders."

Hannibal pulls on latex gloves. "No need to be sloppy," he says.

They go in through the front door. Will rings the doorbell, and when their target answers, Will punches him in the throat. The man staggers back, gasping for air, and then they're in, Hannibal locking the door behind them.

Will gets the man into a chokehold and drags him into the kitchen. The floor is tiled. Less mess, easier to clean.

"A little help," he says to Hannibal.

Hannibal takes the man's wrist and pries his hand away from Will's arm. He doesn't have to work very hard to get the man in a submission hold. Will recalls Hannibal using that one on him once or twice. Hannibal looks at him expectantly while the man begs for his life, voice cracking and choked from the blow to the throat.

"Shut up," Will says absently. "We don't want any of your money."

Hannibal twists the man's wrist a little more. "How would you like to do this?" he asks.

He has a surgeon's bag. Will opens it and rummages around. "What was it he did to his victims?" Will asks.

Hannibal shrugs a little. "He stabbed them to death. The usual penetration issues. Not especially interesting psychology."

Will gets out a knife. "Only seems fair he gets a turn," Will says.

He thinks about the lives this man has taken. The cruelty he is being paid back. Hannibal might not be a vigilante, but Will can cast them as Judge and executioner. It's so easy to stand in judgement. Will smiles down at the man, and lets himself fall into his psychology. Will doesn't have to wear the skin of another killer, but it lends the whole thing a nice touch of irony he thinks Hannibal will appreciate. He brings the knife down.

Hannibal gets out of the way after the first few blows. There's blood everywhere, pooled on the floor, sliding down the plastic suit, spattered on Will's face. He is sweating by the time he stops, panting. He blinks away the shadows of the point of view he took. and is himself again The torso is a pulpy mess and the man isn't breathing any more.

Will stands up, dropping the knife. He can only imagine how he looks right now but Hannibal is watching him with the expression of someone who can't believe their good fortune. Will beckons him over with a bloody hand. "Knock yourself out," he says, kissing Hannibal, words pressed into Hannibal's mouth. "I'm going to fake-ransack the house."

He can feel Hannibal staring at him as he goes but doesn't look back. Will's not so sure he's ready to see whatever Hannibal's planning on doing to the body. Maybe one day, but not yet. By the time he comes back, Hannibal has carried the body to the car and stashed it in the trunk. He takes the backpack full of valuables from Will and tosses them in with the body. The plastic murder suits go in the back as well.

Hannibal opens the car door for Will and Will doesn't say anything about it. He's not even sure Hannibal quite realizes he's doing it.

The valuables go into a garbage can in a shitty part of town. By the time the sun comes up they'll be taken, sold, broken down for parts. No one in this neighbourhood is going to question their good fortune or examine the gift horse too closely.

The body they strip and bury far enough out of town that it won't be found accidentally. It's a little more mangled than Will remembers it being when he left it with Hannibal. He doesn't look too closely.

By the time they make it home the sun is coming up and Will is falling asleep on his feet. It's been physically exhausting. He can't even imagine doing it on his own. Will stumbles through the shower, rinsing off the sweat, and climbs into bed. Will remembers the mattress dipping slightly as Hannibal joins him, but that's all.

He wakes up feeling disorientated around eleven am. Will reaches across the bed, but Hannibal isn't there. It's then he realizes that the fantastic smell wafting through the house is Hannibal cooking.

Will stumbles into the kitchen, yawning and pulling on shorts. "What're you doing?" he says.

Hannibal doesn't exactly look guilty but he doesn't look *not* guilty either. "I thought I would make you dinner," he says evasively.

Will has a closer look at what Hannibal is preparing. "You're going to want to think about this answer very carefully, Hannibal," he says. "Were you planning on feeding me some part of our victim without telling me, or were you waiting for me to wake up before you told me the main ingredient is Soylent Green?"

Hannibal resumes slicing the carrots into perfectly even circles. "My impulse was to surprise you," he admits, but Will knows that's a polite way of saying 'I was going to feed you human flesh and not tell you.'

On the other hand, Will supposes he ought to give Hannibal some credit for at least not trying to lie to him. "I'm not so fond of surprises," Will says. He spots a bottle of his favourite whiskey on the counter. "Although I like bribes." He pours himself a glass and wonders if this is his moral event horizon.

He meets Hannibal's eyes and Hannibal waits for his answer.

It's not his moral anything, Will realizes. He crossed over through the borderland a long time ago. So he thinks instead about how much he actually cares one way or the other. He thinks about how much it means to Hannibal.

Will gets out a teaspoon and scoops out a small amount of whatever it is out of the pot into his mouth. "Needs more spice," he says.

Hannibal drops his knife and turns the stove off. Will doesn't even have time to let go of the spoon before Hannibal pushes the cutting board off the counter and lifts him up onto it. "No it doesn't you terrible thing," he says and kisses Will, warm and solid between Will's thighs. The sunlight is bright, pooling on the floor where the dogs laze, and Will can hear the ocean though the open door. Hannibal smiles his shark's smile, and Will pulls him closer, his own teeth sharp against Hannibal's throat.

The End.

Chapter End Notes

> So here we are. I can't believe this monster is done, and in time for the Big Bang. I'm thrilled you came along on this wild ride with me. So much for a wee drabble eh? I really appreciate all the support you guys have shown me, you're all awesome, and I'll actually try to answer the comments on this chapter. So questions, comments, corrections - you know how to find me.

Works inspired by this one

[podfic] Shark Tank by Rhast

TANQUE DE TIBURONES by Alessa13

Please drop by the Archive and comment to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!